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Elias Kifon Bongmba

Foreword by
Jacob K. Olupona

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The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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Dedicated to

Mr. Johannes Bongmba
A loving and supportive Father

Mr. Isaac Ngala Sayani
Who departed on the eve of the publication of this book

And to

Professor Elisha Stephen Atieno Odhiambo
Friend, Colleague, and Exemplary African Scholar

May the Ancestors reward all of you for your many acts of compassion.

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Notes on Contributors

Afe Adogame, PhD, University of Bayreuth, Germany, is author of *Celestial Church of Christ: The Politics of Cultural Identity in a West African Prophetic-Charismatic Movement*. He has co-edited several and published numerous research articles in peer reviewed journals. Adogame is the Secretary General of the African Association for the Study of Religion.

Edward P. Antonio, PhD, Cambridge University, is the Harvey H. Potthoff Associate Professor of Christian Theology and Social Theory and Associate Dean of Diversities at the Illif School of Theology. In 2010, the Center for Interfaith Action on Global Poverty (CIGA) named Antonio to lead a process in Nigeria for theological reflection and evaluation of the experience of Muslim and Christian faith leaders mutually engaged in interfaith action on malaria prevention throughout the country. He is editor of *Inculturation and Postcolonial Discourse in African Theology* and author of many articles in peer reviewed journals.

Suzanne Preston Blier, PhD, Columbia, is the Allen Whitehill Clowes Professor of Fine Arts and of African and African American Studies, Harvard University. A historian of African art and architecture in both History of Art and Architecture, Blier is author of numerous books, including *The Anatomy of Architecture: Ontology and Metaphor in Batammaliba Architectural Expression*, which won the Arnold Rubin Prize; and *African Vidin: Art, Psychology, and Power*, which received the Charles Rufus Morey Prize. Forthcoming books include *Art and Risk in Ancient Yoruba: Ife History, Power and Identity c. 1300*, *African's Worlds: A History* (with Joseph C. Miller), and *Past Presence: Ancient Ife and the Early Yoruba City State: Imaging African Amazons: The Art of Dahomey Women Warriors*. She is a member of the Collège de France International Scientific and Strategic Committee (COSS).

Elias Kifon Bongmba is the Harry and Hazel Chavanne Chair in Christian Theology and Professor of Religious Studies at Rice University, Houston, Texas. His book *The Dialectics of Transformation in Africa* won the 2007 Frantz Fanon Prize for Outstanding Work in Caribbean Thought. Bongmba is President of the African Association for the Study of Religion.

Christine Chaillot is a specialist of Orthodox Churches whose publications on the Coptic Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, and Ethiopian Churches have been translated into English, Arabic, and Amharic. She is author of *The Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches* (1998). Her forthcoming book discusses the Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe in the twentieth century.

James R. Cochrane, BSc, MDiv, PhD, DDiv h.c., is Professor in Religious Studies, Director of the Research Institute on Christianity and Society in Africa, Co-Director of the International Religious Health Assets Programme, and Senior Research Associate, School of Public Health and Family Medicine, all at the University of Cape Town. Many of his roughly 150 publications have focused on religion in society.

Jean Comaroff is the Bernard E. and Ellen C. Sunny Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, Founding Director of the Chicago Center for Contemporary Theory, and Honorary Professor of Anthropology at the University of Cape Town. **John L. Comaroff** is the Harold H. Swift Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, a Founding Fellow of Chicago Center for Contemporary Theory, Honorary Professor of Anthropology at the University of Cape Town, and Research Professor at the American Bar Foundation. Their current research in post-apartheid South Africa is on crime, policing, and the workings of the state, on democracy and difference, and on the nature of postcolonial politics. Their recent co-authored and co-edited books include *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony* (2006), *Ethnicity, Inc.* (2009), *Zombies et frontières à l'ère néolibérale. Le cas de l'Afrique du Sud postcoloniale* (2010) and, currently in press, *Theory from the South: or, how Euro-America is evolving toward Africa*.

David Cook is Associate Professor at Rice University where he teaches Islam, Muslim apocalyptic literature and movements for radical social change and West African Islam. His publications include *Understanding Jihad* and *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*, *Understanding Jihad*, and *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks* (with Olivia Allison). He is currently doing research on West African Islam, focusing on the vast Arabic literature of sub-Saharan Africa (especially in Nigeria).

James L. Cox is Professor of Religious Studies in the University of Edinburgh. From 1993 to 1998, he directed the University of Edinburgh's African Christianity Project, which included eight African universities in southern and western Africa. He has held prior academic posts at the University of Zimbabwe, Westminster College, Oxford, and Alaska Pacific University. His most recent publications include: *An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion* (2010), *From Primitive to Indigenous: The Academic Study of Indigenous Religions* (2007), and *A Guide to the Phenomenology of Religion* (2006).

Steve de Gruchy was Professor of Theology at the University of KwaZulu Natal where he served as Head of Department. He was researcher and a key member of the African Religious Health Assets project. He served as one of the editors of the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*. He published numerous articles in peer reviewed journals. Among

his many publications are: *Aliens in the Household of God: Homosexuality and Christian Faith in South Africa*; *The Church Struggle In South Africa, Twenty-fifth Anniversary Edition*.

Marleen de Witte, PhD, is a post-doctoral researcher in anthropology at the VU University, Amsterdam. Her research interests include religion (Pentecostalism, African Traditional Religion), and media, cultural heritage, funerals, popular culture, and Ghana/Africa. She has published *Long Live the Dead! Changing Funeral Celebrations in Asante, Ghana* (2001) and many articles and chapters in international journals and volumes.

René Devisch trained in philosophy, anthropology, and psychoanalysis, and is Professor Special Emeritus of Africanist Anthropology at the KU Leuven, Belgium.

Jonathan A. Draper is Professor of New Testament at the School of Religion and Theology of the University of KwaZulu Natal. He is co-author with Richard A. Horsley of *Whoever Hears You Hears Me: Prophets, Performance, and Tradition in Q* (1999), and editor of *The Didache in Modern Research* (1996), *The Eye of the Storm: Bishop John William Colenso and the Crisis of Biblical Inspiration* (2003), *Orality, Literacy, and Colonialism in Southern Africa* (2004), and *Orality, Literacy, and Colonialism in Antiquity* (2004).

Musa W. Dube is an Associate Professor at the University of Botswana, where she has taught Biblical Studies in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies. Dr. Dube served for several years as the theological consultant on HIV/AIDS for the World Council of Churches. She is author of *Postcolonial Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, and co-editor with Gerald West of *The Bible in Africa*. She has published widely on HIV/AIDS and gender issues.

Stephen Ellis is Desmond Tutu Professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam and senior researcher at the African Studies Centre in Leiden. A historian, his main interests are in political history and contemporary history. He has worked especially in West Africa, Madagascar, and South Africa. His most recent book is *Season of Rains: Africa in the World* (2011).

Marc Epprecht is a Professor in the Department of Global Development Studies and History at Queen's University, Kingston, Canada. He has published extensively on the history of gender and sexuality in Africa including *Hungochani: The History of Dissident Sexuality in South Africa* (winner of the 2006 Joel Gregory Prize from the Canadian Association of African Studies) and *Heterosexual Africa? The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS* (Finalist for the 2009 Mel Herskovits prize from the African Studies Association).

Norman Etherington is Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Western Australia at Perth and is a research associate at the University of South Africa. He previously taught at the University of Adelaide. He received his PhD from Yale University. He is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia and a past president of both the Australian Historical Association and the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific. His recent books include *The Great Treks: The*

Transformation of Southern Africa, 1815–1854 (2002), *Missions and Empire* (2005), and *Mapping Colonial Conquest: Australia and Southern Africa* (2007).

Laura S. Grillo holds a PhD in history of religions from the University of Chicago, and an MDiv from Union Theological Seminary. She has received research grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Academy of Religions, and the West Africa Research Association.

Rosalind I.J. Hackett is Professor and Head of Religious Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In 2010, she was re-elected President of the International Association for the History of Religions (until 2015). She has published widely on religion in Africa, notably on new religious movements, and religion and conflict in Nigeria. Her most recent books are *Proselytization Revisited: Right Talk, Free Markets, and Culture Wars* (edited, 2008) and *Displacing the State: Religion and Conflict in a Neoliberal Africa* (co-edited with James H. Smith, 2011).

John H. Hanson, Associate Professor of History at Indiana University, Bloomington, currently is an editor of *History in Africa*. His publications include *Migration, Jihad and Muslim Authority in West Africa* (1996), “Jihad and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Movement,” *Nova Religio* Vol. 11 (2007), and the chapter on twentieth-century sub-Saharan Africa in the *New Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 5 (2010).

Susan Mbula Kilonzo is a lecturer of Sociology of Religion at Maseno University-Kenya. She is author of *Christian Diversity and Community Development: Role of Christian Denominations in Human Physical, Social, Cultural, and Spiritual Development in Vihiga District, Kenya*. Kilonzo's research on Religion and African Culture, Religion and Development, Religion and Youth, Religion and Peacebuilding, and HIV and AIDS in Africa appears in various internationally peer reviewed journals.

P. Pratap Kumar, PhD University of California, Santa Barbara, is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of KwaZulu Natal. A specialist in Hindu studies, he teaches both South Asian religions and comparative religions. Among his many works, he has authored *Hindus in South Africa: Their Traditions and Beliefs* (2000). He has edited several books on Religious Pluralism (2006). He has also published over 60 peer reviewed papers and essays in international journals and books. His current research focuses on migration and sociological changes in the Hindu Diaspora.

Tinyiko Maluleke, a professor at the University of South Africa, is a leading theologian, a respected African intellectual, and the Executive Director of Research at UNISA. He has published more than 70 peer reviewed articles and chapters in scholarly journals on the socio-political significance and role of religion in Africa. Professor Maluleke is also a highly regarded political analyst and commentator on contemporary issues.

Penda Mbow received her doctorate from the University of Aix-Marseille. She is Professor of History at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Senegal. She served as

Minister of Culture in Senegal. She has published widely on Islamic intellectual history. She has held several distinguished fellowships, including the Fulbright, the Rockefeller, and, most recently, a National Endowment for Democracy in Washington, DC. Professor Mbow has served as Director of the Gender Institute for The Social Research Council of Africa, CODESRIA. She is the Founding Director of *Mouvement Citoyen*, centered on promoting intellectual and political leadership among the youth. Decorated in Senegal and abroad, she received the *Docteur Honoris Causa* from the University of Uppsala and was the first woman to receive the John Paul II Prize for Peace.

Carmen McCain is a PhD candidate in the Department of African Languages and Literature at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and Coordinator of the Hausa Home Video Resource Center in the Department of Mass Communication at Bayero University, Kano and a columnist with Nigeria's *Weekly Trust*. Her research focuses on Hausa language films and popular culture in Nigeria.

Birgit Meyer is professor of Religious Studies at the Department of Religious Studies and Theology at Utrecht University. She has conducted research on missions and local appropriations of Christianity, Pentecostalism, popular culture, and video-films in Ghana. Her publications include *Translating the Devil. Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana* (1999), *Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flow and Closure* (edited with Peter Geschiere, Blackwell, 1999), *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment* (edited with Peter Pels, 2003), *Religion, Media and the Public Sphere* (edited with Annelies Moors), and *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses* (2009). Meyer is vice-chair of the International African Institute (London), a member of the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences, and one of the editors of *Material Religion*.

Kenneth Mtata is a post-doctoral researcher of the School of Religion and Theology at the University of KwaZulu Natal. He has lectured also in the Intercultural Theology Programme of Göttingen University through Hermannsburgseminar. He is currently the Study Secretary for Lutheran Theology and Practice at the Department of Theology and Studies of the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva.

V.Y. Mudimbe received his Doctorat en Philosophie et Lettres from the University of Louvain in 1970. He has taught at the Universities of Louvain, Paris-Nanterre, Zaire, Stanford, and Haverford College, and now at Duke University. He has published over a hundred articles, three collections of poetry, four novels, and several books in applied linguistics, philosophy, and social science, including *The Invention of Africa* (1988), *Parables and Fables* (1991), and *The Idea of Africa* (1994). He is a contributor and co-editor of *The Normal and its Orders* (2007) with Gode Iwélé and Laura Kerr.

Sarojini Nadar is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the School of Religion and Theology at the University of KwaZulu Natal. She is Director of the Gender and Religion Programme at the School of Religion and Theology. She has published widely on biblical studies and feminist theology.

David T. Ngong (PhD, Systematic Theology, Baylor University) is Assistant Professor of Religion and Theology at Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He is author of *The Holy Spirit and Salvation in African Christian Theology: Imagining a More Hopeful Future for Africa* (2010). His research interest is in the area of theology and identity. He investigates the cultural, political, and economic identities that various theologies construct.

Matthews A. Ojo is Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife in Nigeria. He is author of *The End Time Army: Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria* and numerous essays on African Initiated Churches. He has served as visiting Professor at Harvard Divinity School and a fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London and at the University of Edinburgh.

Jacob K. Olupona is Professor of Religion at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and at Harvard Divinity School. His research interests include African religions, Indigenous religions, and African religions in the Diaspora. He has authored or edited eight books, including, *Òrìsà Devotion as World Religion: The Globalization of Yorùbá Religious Culture*, co-edited with Terry Rey. His most recent book, *Ile-Ife: The City of 201 Gods*, is an interdisciplinary examination of religious beliefs and practices in daily life. Olupona has received prestigious grants from the Guggenheim Foundation, the American Philosophical Society, the Ford Foundation, the Davis Humanities Institute, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, and the Getty Foundation. He serves on the editorial boards of several journals and is a past president of the African Association for the Study of Religion. In 2000, Olupona received an honorary doctorate in divinity from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, and in 2007, he received the Nigerian National Order of Merit, Nigeria's prestigious award for intellectual accomplishment.

Damaris Seleina Parsitau is a lecturer of African Christianities at Egerton University in Kenya. Her research interests include African Pentecostalism, religion and popular culture, religion and gender, religion and politics, and religion and health. Her current research focuses on Christian–Muslim relations, faith based humanitarianism, FBOs, and women in Kenya. Parsitau has published essays in peer reviewed books and journals. She was Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Cambridge, UK and Edinburgh University in Scotland. She is the East African Representative for the African Association for the Study of Religion (AASR).

Isabel Apawo Phiri is professor in the School of Religion at the University of KwaZulu Natal. She is author of *Women Presbyterianism and Patriarchy: Religious Experiences of Chewa Women in Central Malawi*. Her book co-edited with Sarojini Nadar, *African Women, Religion and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, won the University of KwaZulu Natal book prize and an award from Orbis Books. Professor Phiri is a former Coordinator of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, editor of *Constructive Theology*, and a member of the editorial collective of the *Journal of Southern Africa*. She has lectured widely on African and Feminist Theology around the world.

Susan J. Rasmussen is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Houston. Her interests include religion, gender, the life course, medico-ritual healing and specialists, verbal art performance, cultural memory, and ethnographic analysis. Her four authored books and numerous articles and chapters on society, gender, spirit possession, divination, and diverse topics on the religious experience are based on approximately twenty-five years of fieldwork in Tuareg (Kel Tamajaq) communities of northern Niger and Mali, and briefer fieldwork among Tuareg and other Berber (Amazigh) immigrants, expatriates, and travelers in France and the US. Projects currently in progress focus on rural and urban artisans, modern Tamajaq theatrical plays, and youth cultures.

Allen F. Roberts and **Mary Nooter Roberts** are Professors of Culture and Performance in the Department of World Arts and Cultures at the University of California, Los Angeles. They conduct research, write books, mount major traveling exhibitions, and teach about African arts and humanities. Their exhibition "Memory: Luba Art and the Making of History" (1996) was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and accompanied by a book that won the Alfred H. Barr Award for Museum Scholarship from the College Art Association—the first Africanist volume to be so honored. Their more recent NEH-funded exhibition, "A Saint in the City: Sufi Arts of Urban Senegal," traveled to six American museums (2003–2008); its book won the Herskovits Award as the best African Studies volume of 2003 and the Arnold Rubin Prize as the best African arts book of 2001–2003.

Yushau Sodiq is an Associate Professor of Islamic and Religious Studies at Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas. He earned his MA degree in 1979 in Islamic law from the University of Medina in Saudi Arabia, and MA and PhD degrees in Religious Studies from Temple University, Philadelphia. He taught at the University of Sokoto, Nigeria and at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia. Dr. Sodiq has authored *An Insider's Guide to Islam*, and many articles in peer reviewed journals.

Gerrie ter Haar is Professor of Religion and Development at the International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University, Rotterdam. She has written extensively on religious traditions in Africa and on the theory of religion. She has written, with Stephen Ellis, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (2004). She is also the author of *How God Became African: African Spirituality and Western Secular Thought* (2009).

Asonzeh Ukah is a sociologist/historian of religion and currently serves as Lecturer and Senior Research Fellow at the Department of the History of Religions at the University of Bayreuth in Germany. He is the author of *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power: A Study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria*. Dr. Ukah is a member of a research team based at the University of Bayreuth conducting research on "The Economy of Sacred Space in Durban, South Africa."

David Westerlund, PhD, is Professor in the Study of Religions in the Department for the Study of Religions, Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden. Westerlund has

carried out research on various aspects of African Indigenous Religions, Christianity, and Islam, mainly in Africa and Europe.

Jason R. Zaborowski is Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois. He is author of *The Coptic Martyrdom of John of Phanijoit: Assimilation and Conversion to Islam in Thirteenth-Century Egypt* (2005). His research areas include Arabic, Coptic, and Syriac literature of the Middle East.

Foreword

Jacob K. Olupona

The ever-changing landscape of African religious culture and society requires that scholars provide regular assessment of the field, and based on the particular research with which they are engaged, reflect on the state of the discipline and the religious traditions themselves. The last few decades have seen a strong interest among scholars in the humanities and social sciences in African religious phenomena. Once a preoccupation of the clergy of the Christian and Muslim communities, the study of religion in Africa now involves a multidisciplinary scholarly field. This field has produced significant thematic, conceptual, theoretical, and methodological innovations as well as a substantive focus on the socio-cultural dimensions and contexts of religion, while at the same time taking very seriously religion qua religion. It has attracted phenomenologists, theologians, comparativists, anthropologists, sociologists, literary critics, and those who practice and study the arts: music, literature, and the visual and material arts, among others. These new approaches have produced path-breaking monographs, books, and journal articles. Until now, however, no single book has reflected sufficiently on the wide range of topics, themes, and theoretical interventions possible in this field to provide a well-rounded picture of the state of African religious scholarship.

To answer the need for such a work, Elias Bongmba has assembled *A Companion to African Religions*, a book that attempts to demonstrate the breadth and depth of this scholarship and the tradition itself. This gigantic volume has pushed the boundaries of discourse forward and made this important material accessible to students, scholars, and the general readership. Elias K. Bongmba's training and scholarship eminently qualify him to take the lead in producing this massive volume, whose essays reveal so compellingly the interdisciplinary nature of African religious scholarship, which has striven to integrate theology with the history of religions, anthropology with oral literature, and sociology with ethnographic research, to give just a few examples. Moreover, Bongmba's linguistic and scholarly competence, especially in African Francophone and Anglophone scholarship and traditions, makes it possible for him to draw from both cultures and regions to compile this fascinating work. This work, then, provides continuity in African religious research, but it also exemplifies a healthy discontinuity in its innovative theoretical and methodological engagements with several salient but

previously unexamined topics. Africa has a triple religious heritage. Islam, Christianity, and indigenous religions constitute the core traditions that are examined by scholars; but they do not exist as separate entities in the lives of the people, and the essays in this volume reflect that pertinent fact.

As the editor notes, the volume reflects continuity both with past and present work. From its ethnographic essays to its theological interpretations, the volume reflects the status of African religious traditions both in their lived realities and in their invented and imagined contexts. It is clear to us that scholars can no longer treat African religious traditions as forms of static entities that have not changed over time and space. As we now recognize, religious traditions are dynamic and constantly in motion, impinging on modernity, responding to new technology, and being transformed by newly imagined immigrant and diasporic communities. Africa has witnessed both the good and the ugly in the range of possibilities of human existence. Certainly, Africa has seen in the last few decades more than her fair share of vicious civil wars, military misrule and civilian dictatorship, HIV/AIDS, corruption, gender disparity, and sexual violence. Paradoxically, Africa has also witnessed significant social transformation, from political emancipation to new democratic governance and emerging economies. All of these developments, both negative and positive, have affected the practice of religion. These essays reflect on this critical fact in the lives of Africans across the continent.

This volume also delves into African religions' responses to modernity in its various guises. These responses reflect the increasing connections between African belief systems and cultural and social conditions, such as between witchcraft and sorcery on the one hand and political power, poverty, wealth, and sexuality on the other. Technology and the mass media have also affected the fortune of religion in the last few decades, as it aids its spread and contributes to its transformation in the new global age. The twenty-first century presents a special challenge, as Africa has been thrust into the center of a global conversation on religion, culture, and society, especially the sometimes conflict-ridden dialogue between Islam and Christianity. African intellectuals can participate in this conversation by providing new and constructive approaches to existing problems. Several of the essays included here have done so in a way that makes the volume required reading and an important reference tool for African religious scholars.

Ever since John Mbiti's classic work *African Religion and Philosophy* broke down the boundaries constricting the study of African religion, this discipline has expanded in exciting new directions. We have moved from the traditional phenomenological approaches of the 1970s, when I was in graduate school, to focus on theological concerns that dominated African scholarship in the apartheid era, when the racial divide highlighted the theological confrontation between black theology of liberation and Afrikaner civil religion in southern Africa. The last few decades have seen the flowering of women's and gender studies, especially in theological circles. In the current dispensation, the debate on sexuality that thrust African churches into the center of one of the largest crises in Christendom and that raises serious ethical and human rights concerns proves that African religious scholarship can no longer shy away from contentious topics. For contemporary African scholars not to address these issues would be considered a serious disservice to the study of religion in Africa. Religion certainly matters in

Africa and scholars of religion have a significant role to play in discussing and framing issues on how African faith traditions perform in the public sphere. This collection of essays clearly shows how African scholarship has done so.

The volume breaks out of the disciplinary boundaries characteristic of the old scholarship to promote transdisciplinary engagement with the topics whereby individual scholars are able to use every available tool of interpretation and analysis. In addition, several of the essays explicate the connections between faith traditions and occultism, sexuality, and HIV/AIDS. The volume exemplifies what African religious studies should be, a joint enterprise that encourages participation on the part of white and black scholars, Africans and non-Africans, in the serious task of investigating, analyzing, and engaging in scholarship that transcends colonial and postcolonial boundaries.

Bongmba must be commended for privileging the continent and focusing entirely on African culture, religion, and society. He has decided not to be influenced by current academic fashion, which favors studies of diasporic and immigrant scholarship. Bongmba prefers to do an in-depth study of Africa. One cannot have a good grasp of the Black Atlantic without a thorough grasp of the “home” tradition. Nevertheless, the study of the African diasporic and immigrant study deserves future study. From this fascinating volume will emerge significant rhizomes, which will form topics of dissertations in the years to come. This volume also lays the foundation for an eventual encyclopedia of African religion, which Africanist scholars will most likely spearhead in the near future.

Bongmba’s volume contains excellent essays representing the full range of African religious traditions. It offers a refreshing approach to the study of African religion in which scholars think and write about religion not as fixed beliefs and practices, but as sacred orientations and activities that produce meaningful responses from others. Africans’ constant quest for the transcendent and the sacred are greatly appreciated as traditions in motion and in relationship with the peoples’ geographical environment, political realities, social context, and cultural practices. The beauty of this work is that it provides a useful archaeology of African religious studies scholarship that explores the intellectual history of the study of this tradition, and in doing so, it enables us to recognize and to acknowledge what the field was, what the current scholarship is, and the new directions we might like it to take in the twenty-first century.

A Companion to African Religions is a richly detailed volume of essays that amply demonstrates how far the academic study of religions in Africa has come. Unlike before, when African voices were hardly heard in works describing the religions of their own peoples, this volume clearly includes African agency in interpreting the religious events unfolding on the continent. It is worth noting that the African Association for the Study of Religion, which began in Zimbabwe in 1992 as a global forum for the study of religion in Africa and currently chaired by the editor of this volume, has contributed immensely to the present status of scholarship through an African-centered governing body supported by friends and colleagues in North America and Europe. The association has spurred many intellectual exchanges, and over the years, the many conversations that took place at conferences, seminars, and lectures sponsored by this body have led to a flowering of scholars, of African religion, many of whom are contributors to this outstandingly comprehensive body of work.

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Elias K. Bongmba
Houston, TX, July 2011

Introduction

Elias K. Bongmba

This *Companion to African Religions* introduces the reader to research and an engaging dialogue on the religious imagination and experience in the African context.¹ The scholars whose essays appear here were given a broad latitude and flexibility to explore their topics and the result far exceeds our intention because what we have here is a transdisciplinary exploration of religious experience in addition to analysis of some major religious traditions, ideas, and religious practice in Africa. Contributors were invited to address creatively a variety of issues from their research and scholarly engagement to provide a resource on significant information, on historical trajectories, current research, and future perspectives while engaging in lively conversation on methodological, theoretical, interpretive perspectives, and emerging ideas on religion in a post-neocolonial global climate.

The *Companion* is organized into three parts. In Part I the authors discuss religious experience from selected methodological perspectives. I must state here that even when the essay does not address all of the technical details of methodology as some of the essays in Part I do, they are included in the methodology section because they significantly reflect recent theoretical and methodological developments. Part II, the longest part of the book, is devoted to essays on different aspects of religious life, highlighting selected traditions, movements, contemporary issues, innovations, and contested issues from the Christian tradition and its African Initiated Churches, Islam, Neo-traditional religions, and Hinduism in South Africa. We recognize that in a volume like this, it is not possible to cover all traditions and it is the hope that other publications could take up the rich religious diversity that exists in Africa. In Part III, the scholars discuss broadly religious life in cultural and intellectual areas by looking at religion from selected disciplinary perspectives or topics.

One would expect a work like this to start by defining religion and African religions; but this is not the case because of the complexity of religious life in Africa. V.Y. Mudimbe and Susan Kilonzo discuss the idea of the religious in their essay and Stephen Ellis and

Gerrie ter Haar also offer a brief definition of religion. In my own approach, I have moved between Clifford Geertz's view that religion is a set of symbols that have a strong, persistent, continuing impact on the dispositions and action of people by offering ideas on existence in a manner that is appealing to the people who see these sets of symbols as a reflection of reality,² and Paul Tillich's theological perspective which has also influenced my view that religion involves practices that reflect an individual's ultimate concerns.³ These essays discuss the religious experience and expression as part of a symbolic, concrete, and historical world mediated by human and spiritual forces. The transdisciplinary perspectives provide descriptive and critical analysis of the religious experience as thoughtful experience that will remain open to analysis and critique. It is obvious that we provide only a snapshot of religion and the religious experience in Africa by drawing from past and current research to address contemporary issues with the hope of opening a critical dialogue about the future of religion in Africa. The scholars all have long-term research engagement in Africa and are uniquely qualified to undertake this critical enterprise. Religion is growing fastest in Africa and growth in some traditions defies expectations. Some of the essays in this volume present the dynamic and changing nature of Pentecostalism as an idea, praxis, and community. It is a target that is grounded in local spaces but embraces a global outlook, and structured within institutional and economic frameworks that reverses previous perspectives on religious institutions or denominationalism.

This book reflects a continuity and discontinuity with the scholarly literature on African religions. First, in terms of continuity, it follows a scholarly tradition of publishing interdisciplinary and critical analysis of the "variety of religious experience" in Africa since the 1950s and we illustrate it with a few selected examples. Daryll Forde edited *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples*, in which the authors explored the cosmology of selected African communities, linking cosmology and religious experience. Terence Ranger and I.N. Kimambo edited *The Historical Study of African Religion* based on papers presented at a conference on that subject at the University of Dar-es-Salaam.⁴ This landmark work contained an analysis of socio-economic and political issues that shape religiosity but, more importantly, established the historicity of African religions, an idea previously dismissed by scholars like Geoffrey Parrinder. Three years later, T.O. Ranger and John Weller edited *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa* from the papers presented at the Chilema Lay Training Center in Malawi in 1971 where participants discussed missionization, colonialism, indigenous religions, experiments with the adaptation of local rituals into the Christian tradition, Christianity and African nationalism, and the growth of African Initiated Churches (AIC).⁵

Wim van Binsbergen and Martin Schoffeleers edited the groundbreaking *Theoretical Explorations in African Religion* in 1985 based on papers presented at a conference at the University of Leiden in 1979. The authors probed theoretical developments in a multi-disciplinary perspective, explored early cultic practices in parts of Africa, and new developments within African Initiated Churches (AIC), which at the time were no longer protest movements but a socio-religious reality on the symbolic landscape in Africa. Thomas D. Blakely, Walter E.A. van Beek, and Dennis L. Thomson edited the papers *Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression* in 1994 based on the papers that

were presented at a conference at Brigham Young University in 1986. The editors grouped the essays in three areas: the translatability of religion, comparison, and performance demonstrating in different ways religious experience and expression in daily life. In 1991, Jacob K. Olupona edited *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*. The essays discuss beliefs, practices, the study of African religions, and the revitalization of African religions today.⁶ Jan Platvoet, James Cox, and Jacob Olupona edited the massive book, which is rich in resources, *The Study of Religion in Africa*, based on papers presented at the African Association for the Study of Religion in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1992.⁷

Other studies were regional in nature. For example, *Revealing Prophets*, edited by David Anderson and Douglas Johnson, provided insightful studies of the prophetic imagination in African religious life.⁸ Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle edited *Religion and Politics in East Africa* in 1995 and contributors discussed interaction between religions, individuals, and the state; as well as the debate on *shari'a* in Sudan, and church/ state struggles in Uganda and Kenya.⁹ Thomas Spear and Isara N. Kimambo edited *East African Expressions of Christianity*, in which the scholars explored missions, popular evangelism, conversion, Charismatic movements, revivalism, and the impact of Christianity on society.¹⁰ In Kenya, theologian Jesse N.K. Mugambi and his colleagues have edited numerous books on Christianity in Africa providing a critical analysis of local and continent-wide developments. Several of the works have addressed themes such as reconstruction, an idea Mugambi addressed in his Rockwell Lectures at Rice University in 1992. David Chidester and a team of researchers edited annotated bibliographies on religion in South Africa, while Martin Prozesky and John de Gruchy edited *A Southern African Guide to World Religions*, in which the authors introduced readers to different religious traditions in South Africa, and *Living Faiths in South Africa*, in 1992.¹¹ M.F.C. Bourdillon edited *Christianity South of the Zambezi*: a text that explored Christianity in the southern African region.¹² Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport edited a brilliant study of Christianity in South Africa, addressing among other issues the beginning of Christianity in South Africa, the churches of modern South Africa, African Initiated Churches (AIC), Christianity and “sub-cultures,” Christianity and the creative arts, and Christianity, race, and power.¹³

Eva Evers Rosander and David Westerlund edited *African Islam and Islam in Africa*, in 1997.¹⁴ The authors discuss Sufism, *shari'a*, *tahara* (purity), and *baraka* (blessing). The book also explored Sufi rural spirituality, Islamic radicalism in North Africa, human rights, the translation of the Qur'an into local languages, Islamic music, relationship between men and women, and Islam and ethnicity in Africa. In 2000, Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Pouwels edited *The History of Islam in Africa* and the authors discussed patterns of Islamization, growth of Islam in different regions of Africa, and broad issues like law, gender, Islamic education, Islamic brotherhoods, healing, the arts, literature, and music.

Recently, Frieder Ludwig and Afe Adogame edited *European Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa*, a collaborative project between Bayreuth University and the African Association for the Study of Religion.¹⁵ The authors address African religion in western scholarship by focusing on Islam, Christian missions, the contribution of leading scholars, institutions, and contemporary studies of religion within Africa. Scott S. Reese has

edited *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*, in which the authors address geographical and historical perspectives on Islamic studies in Africa. Some of the studies in the book discuss well-known movements, such as the *Tijaniyah*, scholars like Murtada al-Zabidi (1732–91), and the Fondo Kati library in Niger.¹⁶ Jacob Olupona and Terry Rey have recently edited *Òrìsà Devotion as World Religion: the Globalization of Yorùbá Religious Culture* from a conference paper at Florida International University. The essays explore Yorùbá religion at home and in the diaspora. In the keynote address presented at the conference, Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka discussed the tolerant spirit of African Gods, ignored and abused by colonials, who sought to impose their own religions on Africans.

In theology, several books explored the Africanization of the Christian Church. Beginning with *Des Prêtres noirs s'interrogent*, in 1957, scholars have called for a theological praxis that reflects African culture and liberation.¹⁷ In 1978, E.W. Fashole Luke et al. published the landmark book, *Christianity in Independent Africa*.¹⁸ The authors analyzed African Christianity, the growth of AIC, changes in missionization, and the importance of African thought as an equal source of materials for the study of the Christian tradition in Africa. Other essays discussed social services, and relations between Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religions. In 1992, Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro and Mercy Amba Oduyoye edited *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa*, a landmark publication that was the first book in a series of studies by The Circle of Concerned African Woman Theologians (The Circle).¹⁹ This book also sketched a future agenda for theological reflection in Africa as part of a broad and critical intellectual engagement to address gender issues in African society.

Second, regarding discontinuity, one important feature of this *Companion* is that we emphasize a trans-disciplinary analysis of the religious experience, devoting the last major section of the book to religious perspectives from various disciplines and contemporary intellectual dialogue as an important way of imaging religious life in Africa today.

The first groups of essays address methodological and theoretical perspectives on religion. In chapter 1, James Cox discusses methodological perspectives used to understand the religious experience in the African context. Drawing from his teaching experience in Zimbabwe, Cox argues the phenomenological approach because it minimizes the insider/outsider debate on the study of religion and focuses on the subject matter. Phenomenology stresses *epoché*, which Edmund Husserl used to refer to the suspension of one's beliefs to allow the subject under investigation to speak on its own terms. Phenomenologists also use the eidetic intuition to understand the meaning of the religious phenomena, the entities, and their universality. The process involves an intersubjective empathy because the scholars attempt to understand the thoughts of the practitioners and, through the process of interpolation, scholars relate to the thought and actions of other human beings or imagine what it might be like to have faith or belong to a religious community. This open approach to religion does not start with an affirmation or assumption that there is a Supreme Being, since an *epoché* broadens the terrain of inquiry through which the scholar unveils divers symbols and meanings of the religious experience.

In chapter 2, V.Y. Mudimbe and Susan Mbula Kilonzo discuss philosophical dimensions of religious experience by grounding their analysis of the religious and its rites as social acts as was conceptualized by Emile Durkheim. In doing this, they bypass

“traditional” philosophical focus on such topics as the rationality of belief, the existence of God, the problem of evil, natural religion, and miracles. Instead, Mudimbe and Kilonzo offer philosophical interpretations and a critical textual dialogue on the religious experience by reflecting on a broad range of rituals, symbols, space, time, death, and eschatology; problematizing areas of convergence and differences in Africa in light of the encounter with Christianity and Islam and the will to Africanization of the new religions. Their approach appreciates metaphysics without privileging the natural theological and ontological perspectives. They also combine hermeneutical approaches, employ linguistic categories, and analyze the spatial realities that structure the religious experience as well as unveil a pluralistic demand to understand “mythic, doctrinal, ethical, [and] social” aspects of the religious experience.

Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (chapter 3) bring a social scientific analysis to symbolic thought and practices at the dawn of the new millennium; a period greatly anticipated by the computer world in the march towards “Y 2K,” the great apocalypse that did not materialize. However, the Comaroffs argue that a new sense of order and disorder arrived with the epoch. The new *zeitgeist* was employed by people to exploit the desire and quest for wealth in a manner that rejects aspects of Max Weber’s Protestant ethic and the rise of capitalism. What we have seen is that people have ignored the role of thrift and restraint on spending and people have chased, and continue to chase, financial gains, embrace conspicuous consumption at the expense of thrift, and ignore economic discipline. Get-rich-quick schemes ignored Adam Smith’s notion of the creation of wealth.

What is disturbing is the fact that religious communities boldly popularize get-rich schemes by claiming that Christians are destined to be wealthy and that the response from some of the churches to economic crisis stands as a demonstration of a new second coming of capitalism when there are doubts about the success of economic liberalization or the advancement of democratic ideals. The rise of civil society has not slowed down consumerism; human rights abuses and exclusions based on class, race, gender, and sexuality continue to grow. The millennial and the magical chase for wealth at the expense of freedoms, and exclusion of “the great containers of modern social order have been fractured, so have the cultural, ethical, and spiritual coordinates on which they were founded; coordinates that charted a conceptual and institutional terrain long taken for granted in classic Western . . . ideology and its civil extensions: among them, the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, the transcendent and the temporal, the material and the moral, the pious and the pecuniary—and, most of all, modernity and enchantment.” The intense search for capital even in emerging religious communities has created occult economies, Ponzi get-rich schemes, and “here, again, is the specter, the distinctive spirit, of neoliberalism in its triumphal hour.” It is a spirit reflected in many of the budding Pentecostal Churches.

René Devisch (chapter 4) provides critical methodological insight into studying divination by emphasizing the bodiliness of divination, mischaracterized by others as an irrational animistic system that owes its existence to vindictive spirits, ancestors, and sorcery. These prejudices could be overcome by studying divination as a “bodily, affect-laden, sensory, mediumnic, artistic-fold, and skills of human consciousness.” One could argue that Devisch updates his own 1985 perspective on divination by analyzing “the

inter-world-interconnectivity” of divination in light of recent cognitive approaches to divination; a broad field of praxis involving consciousness and oracular scrutiny in an inter-human world, which lies beyond facts and involves an un-concealment that motivates client and diviner to employ all sensory mechanisms to seek reasons and insights into the client’s condition and future. Divination still involves shamans or *sangomas* who serve as experts and facilitate experiential, visionary, and sensorial contact with the world of the spirit. Devisch captures all this in a wonderful phrase: “experiential phenomenological and praxis-oriented approaches to divination,” which involves language to explore “the realm of unnegotiable given or unassimilable kernel at the heart of human experience beneath or beyond sheer appearance, semblance, and pretending, imagination, symbolization or language game.” These experiences dissolve boundaries of the self, expand, and integrate self into a social world. Participants, especially the diviner, enter a cosmic drama in order to understand the interworldly experience, making divination an intersubjective engagement that grafts one’s self into a new perceptual self. In that process, the medium’s perceptive dreaming or revelatory experience cannot be separated from interdependence, intercommunication between all things in the experience of an interworldly praxis where divination is understood as life-bearing connotations, which “elaborates an ‘archaeological’ process of inter-world-originating a process that seeks to re-attune the client’s lived world in consonance with the ‘arche’ or ‘ceaseless re-emergence of the uterine life-source that gives birth to the local world’.”

Jonathan Draper and Kenneth Mtata write on orality as a method and in chapter 5 argue that religious life in Africa derives material from oral traditions. Scholars like Jan Vansina, Isidore Okpewho, Walter Ong, and Werner Kelber discussed the importance of Orality as performance and ritual enactment of traditions through songs, stories, legends, epics, which provide an insight into religious belief and communication in the community.²⁰ Draper and Mtata discuss the oral dimensions of hymns and testimonies of the Ama Nazaretha of Isaiah Shembe and George Khambule’s *Ibandla Labancwele*. Other examples of oral literature include Qur’an recitations and Swahili *tenzi* (poems), songs, rock paintings, sculpture, memory boards, scarifications, necklaces, and symbols found in sacred places and objects that have provided inspiration for oral performances. The Great Hymn of Ntsikana is a major theological statement and Isaiah Shembe’s “hymns combine Zulu . . . diction and imagery with strong allusions to biblical . . . and Western hymnic conventions in creative tension.” Their essay invites a focus on the compelling oral dimensions of religious life.

Laura Grillo (chapter 6) argues that rituals are “thoughtful, deliberate, self-conscious [and] strategic [actions] conducted by self-conscious agents” as they “negotiate a responsible relationship in the human community with the ancestors, spirits, divinities, and cosmos.” Rituals involve more than abstract ideas because they are embodied activity. Grillo demonstrates many ways in which rituals involve a concrete body by discussing ritual practices and ritual objects. For example, in the Yoruba tradition the head, which is considered “seat of destiny,” receives great attention at initiation ceremonies. The body is also ritualized through scarification, circumcision, and other bodily symbols that have evocative power. Grillo also demonstrates that rituals are not merely repetitive events but thought and action related to cosmic events that have shaped

local and in some cases national narratives. Local communities use masquerades at local celebrations to evoke the cosmic dimensions of rituals. Divinatory rituals involve complex interpretive processes because diviners do not merely give quick answers to their clients but invite them to enter a complex world of meanings that are worked in social relations. Grillo argues that rituals remain dynamic events that activate energy through their polysemic activities, offering a stage for the performance of agency, moral encounters, and expressions of the desire for healing, reconciliation, and a search for wholeness.

In chapter 7, Musa Dube adopts a methodological approach to African Indigenous Religions (AIR) that privileges but is not limited to feminist perspectives. Dube problematizes AIRs whose structure “consists in the [recognizing the reality of a] community of creation, the living Dead and God.” Religious life and its ethical traditions are taught in examples, proverbs, mythology, music, and rituals. In colonial society, foreigners defined African religions largely in negative terms. Scholars who today refer to AIRs do want to use broad terms that provide a placeholder for the diverse spiritual practices that are carried out on the continent. Dube calls for the decolonization of early scholarship on AIR even by members of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians that seemed to imply that misogyny in AIR could be corrected by the Christian story. Studies of the goddess tradition have highlighted female religious aspects to demonstrate possibilities for gender equality. Dube argues that the Herero people uphold both patrilineal and matrilineal descent and the Gikuyu people honor both of their ancestors, Gikuyu and his wife Mumbi, whose name means creator. These perspectives point to aspects of egalitarianism and reject the notion that power belongs exclusively to men. Reversing patriarchy requires a critical linguistic engagement with African ideas, especially in parts of Africa where God is not gendered in local languages. This calls for “decolonizing and depatriarchalizing biblical translations.” African Indigenous Churches (AIC), where women have played an important role as founders and Kimpa Vita who was a revolutionary theologian, are good examples for overcoming patriarchy and the colonial mentality that has developed prejudices against AIR.

The environment has received attention in African religious studies through the work of M. Danneel on earth keeping ministries in Zimbabwean Independent Churches, and the critical and brilliant constructive theological engagement of Ernst Conradie, who in many publications has called attention to the ecological in Africa and its foreboding consequences. Edward P. Antonio in chapter 8 discusses the religious philosophy of the environment arguing that the environmental crisis calls for urgent critical reflection on climate change since Africans consider the earth sacred through an interdisciplinary approach that takes scientific, ecological, and political realities in Africa seriously. Such a philosophical engagement ought to focus on present problems, address the green gas effect, pollution caused by the rich nations, and think critically of addressing the scarcity of resources without causing more damage to the ecosystem. This implies a tacit recognition that human behavior lies behind climate change and environmental degradation that threaten livelihood and erode sacred places that have been used for rituals. Antonio draws on data from the Dogon, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe to discuss the inviolability of sacred groves ignored as human beings have over explored the environment.

We round up methodological concerns with Birgit Meyer's essay in chapter 9, a *tour de force* which provides an important snapshot into the scholarship on African Initiated Churches and the dynamic shift from their emphasis on the Africanness of the church to the new identity of Pentecostal Charismatic Churches (PCC). While not all AICs have made the shift to Pentecostalism, many have done so and the new situation imposes new theoretical approaches to understand not only the religious experience in Africa, but Africanization and global demands and projects. The changes do not do away with debates on the relationship between Christianity and traditional religion evident in the constant search and debate on Africanization; the relationship between religion and the state in Africa; different ways of understanding and assessing the new paradigms of healing; and the search for wealth by members of the Pentecostal movement on the continent. Pentecostalism, initially ignored by social scientists, has become the focus of research during the last two and half decades because of their growth, organization, theology, and praxis. One clear methodological shift in the scholarship is the recognition that AICs are not merely an Africanization of the Christianity project because the PCCs view African traditions negatively and promote deliverance from "ancestral traditions." The association of PCCs with political leaders in the wake of economic and social decline required further scrutiny because the PCCs could not be labeled simply as apolitical communities. Meyer contends that future scholars can no longer assume a fixed definition of religion as a belief system, but need to look for the dynamic changes that are taking place in these churches in light of globalization and migrations.

Part II contains essays on indigenous religious traditions, Christianity, and Islam. Marlene de Witte, in chapter 10, discusses revitalization and innovation in neo-traditional religions, which owe much of their existence to modernization and globalization. Members use indigenous religious ideas to counter the marginalization of African religions by Islam and Christianity. De Witte focuses on innovation in The Afrikania Mission in Ghana founded by a former Roman Catholic Priest, Kwabena Damuah in 1982. His desire was to promote Afrikan religion as a source of pride and strength for the Afrikan people. In its early days the group benefited from the moral and material support of Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, then military dictator of Ghana, but who later turned to Pentecostal Churches for political support. Afrikanians celebrate Afrikan deities, spirits, and some aspects of ancient Egyptian religion such as the worship of the Sun God, Amen-Ra. The community has grown under the new leader, Osofo Komfo Kofi Ameve. Afrikania leaders offer spiritual consultation to address felt needs. De Witte argues that the success of the group depends on their ability to negotiate transnationalization, spiritualization, and commercialization to demonstrate that "pre-modern religious resources, structurally mobile and highly adaptable as they are, may become extra powerful and compelling when cast in global formats of commercialized spirituality in the new religious space opened by the Internet and other mass media."

Studies of spirit possession that began during the high noon of symbolic anthropology with Edward Evans-Pritchard have received great attention during the last half of the twentieth century. Susan Rasmussen, in chapter 11, discusses spirit possession in Africa by drawing from local worldviews, indigenous religious ideas, and organized religion like Islam. Rasmussen describes spirit possession as a condition in which an alien spirit comes into a person, displaces the consciousness of that individual, and

makes demands of the individual that must be met. If this happens regularly, it might be a sign that the individual is being called to become a medium. In Tuareg society, where Rasmussen has carried out her research, illness might indicate a spirit has possessed someone. The treatment of possession often includes drumming and singing. Possession may be induced, or may be the initiative of the spirit. The possession may cause illness, trance, or other unusual activity.

Spirit possession affects both men and women and has positive moral implications for the individuals and society. The possession draws from religious themes (use of Muslim terms *jinn* or *jinni Shaytani*, or terms like *mhondoro* and *ngoma* in southern Africa) and have religious significance. Its epistemological dimension includes perspectives on therapeutic, religious, aesthetic, and political dimensions of social life. Rasmussen argues that in the case of *Zar* “possession occurs in a demonstrative, ritualistic setting which engenders new thought and reflection, as through story-telling or theatrical performance. Similarly, in Tuareg *tende-n-goumaten* possession rituals, the satirical song verses enable the expression of multiple voices and viewpoints on issues of concern through mocking, yet often oblique and subtle, social commentaries.” Possession may involve a complex of personal and social issues that includes an absent spouse, love that is not expressed, and the social conditions of one’s relatives.

The next several essays focus on the Christian tradition in Africa. Norman Etherington in his essay on Christian missions in Africa (chapter 12) asks an important question: What would be different in African Christianity without modern mission influence? To answer this question, Etherington discusses important developments, themes, and movements in the mission encounter in Africa, which in some areas ended in disgrace as Portuguese missionaries engaged in slave trading in the Congo. However, some missionaries like Johannes Van der Kemp and John Phillip criticized white domination in the Cape Colony because it deprived locals of their liberty; a project that would later demand direct action from clerics like Archbishop Dennis Hurley and Desmond Tutu.

Missionaries contributed very little to actual conversions because Africans did most of the conversions. In its early stages, Etherington argues, “behind the small body of paid foreign missionaries stood a veritable army of unpaid or barely paid local assistants.” Missionaries invested in education, introduced denominationalism and faith missions, and saw Christian independency take people away from some of their churches. Missionaries like Joseph Booth with independent spirits and ideas often complicated the story of missions in Africa, making it difficult to argue that all missionaries collaborated with colonials. Missionaries also developed grammars for local languages, contributed to cultural developments with new building styles, introduction of clerical vestments, and music.

David Ngong argues in chapter 13 that Christianity in Africa has also been a search for wellbeing. Early Christian communities in North Africa affected local social life but declined with the social upheaval that resulted from the Donatist tradition and the coming of Islam. A Constantinian model dominated the second phase of Christian presence in Africa because a few political leaders, who failed to develop a healthy materialist attitude to focus on policies that could improve the lives of people, used Christianity to promote selfish ambitions to stay in power. Ngong argues that contemporary African Christianity, lauded for its phenomenal growth, has an obligation to work with other

communities of discourse to end the culture of violence, corruption, marginalization, as well as address the needs of the many poor people on the continent.

During the last decades of the twentieth century, monographs on the history of Christianity in Africa have also discussed Egyptian Christianity, especially the Coptic Church, increasingly linking Egyptian and African Christianity. In chapter 14, Jason Zaborowski discusses the Coptic Church in Egypt, pointing out that the Coptic language today, as in the past, remains a critical tool for studying the Coptic Church which has developed rich intellectual, theological, and monastic traditions with leading monastics Saint Antony, Saints Macarii, Saint Pachomius, and Saint Shenoute, who was well known for his prophetic voice. The Coptic Church has developed literature in Arabic and noted scholars like Sawirus wrote theological theses on the Trinity, Christology, and on God as creator. Coptic Christianity survived the Islamic era and, during the period of European colonialism, Copts and Muslims shared nationalist feelings and worked to preserve Egyptian sovereignty. Reform-minded leaders in the church have used the Coptic council to reform education, call for greater participation in Egyptian life, and its devotional tradition is exemplified by the work of the monk, Matthew the Poor, who has demonstrated that the traditional view of the Coptic Church as a detached institution is not true. His social activism debunks accounts that the Coptic Church has lost its social focus completely. In the post-Sadat era, the church has reformed the Sunday School Movement, and there is an increasing interest among the Copts on their scholarly traditions.

Christine Chaillot in chapter 15 introduces the reader to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Made the official religion by King Azana, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church remained under the Patriarchate of Alexandria in Egypt until Emperor Haile Selassie succeeded in breaking the long tie with the Egyptian Coptic Church. Military rulers who came to power after the revolution of 1974 disestablished the Orthodox Church giving room for Catholics and other Protestant groups in the country to proselytize in the country. Chaillot argues that the theology of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church places emphasis on Jesus, and venerates Mary the mother of Jesus. Emperor Yohannes IV reformed the education system of the church and its theological schools and monasteries; expanding the monastic institution to about 800 monasteries. Following the revolution of 1974 and the economic and social turmoil that followed, many Ethiopians moved overseas and established branches of the Orthodox Church.

Elias Bongmba (chapter 16) argues that North African theology played a key role in the growth of Christian theology that would later experience a rebirth in Africa in the broad intellectual climate of Pan-Africanism, Négritude, inculturation, and the Black Consciousness Movement. African theologians brought the African voice to theology in cultural and liberation projects that challenged the ecclesial and political domination of Africa. Bongmba characterizes theology in Africa today as a contextual, linguistic, and critical reflection on the religious experience. Theology is a *grenzwissenschaft*, because theological propositions remain open to amendment. It is also an inter-human engagement. The Bible has remained a significant source for contextual theological thinking covering inculturation, liberation, feminist theology, narrative theology, ecological theology, and Pentecostal theology. A theology of health is emerging as scholars

reflect on HIV and AIDS. Doctrinal developments include a focus on Jesus Christ for the African church. African theologians have used local titles to describe Christ.

The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (The Circle) has placed gender at the center of their analysis of religious experience. Isabel Apawo Phiri in chapter 17 argues that colonial Christianity facilitated the growth of existing patriarchy and some cultural practices to marginalize women even from leadership positions they exercised in traditional religions. Although women missionaries demonstrated liberative dimensions of Christianity, African women still encountered difficulties accessing leadership positions, and were excluded from the ordained ministry. The Anglican Church only ordained its first woman priest in 1992. In addition, women seeking theological education received little or no funds to pursue their studies, and those enrolled in theological schools were encouraged to focus on ministry related subjects or marry pastors and theologians. Despite these setbacks, women have played an important role in the African Church. Phiri argues that patriarchy remains a hurdle to be overcome and churches could learn from indigenous religions and create an equal space for men and women to serve, study, and teach theology.

In chapter 18, Sarojini Nadar argues that feminist theology in Africa has grown through the work of The Circle. Members of The Circle have engaged in critical contextual theology using stories, life histories, and the experience of women. While situating the rise of feminist theology in global feminist consciousness and praxis, Nadar argues that African women theologians draw from “their experiences from within varied African contexts: colonialism, apartheid, and patriarchal oppression within culture.” Members of the Circle employ a hermeneutics of suspicion in studying oppressive narratives in the light of the experience of African women. Such a reading of texts and the tradition that draws from local narratives for theological thinking strengthens the subjectivity of African women. Mercy Amba Oduyoye in *Daughters of Anowa* has explored mythic themes to articulate a theology that engenders hope. The goal of their work is to “see, judge, and act” to bring theological thinking and praxis together to change gender disparity in African communities.

One area where the Christian tradition has made an impact is on post-apartheid policy in South Africa. On May 19, 1995, President Nelson Mandela signed the “Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation” bill into law, which called for the appointment of a commission (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission; TRC) to investigate and redress the painful legacy of apartheid.²¹ The Commission was to investigate and establish the best possible picture of the nature and extent of the many violations of human rights from 1960 to 1990. The commission was to examine the “antecedents, circumstances, factors, and context of such violations,” hear the victims, and gather information about the motives of the perpetrators of those gross violations through public hearings. The commission was also charged with “facilitating the granting of amnesty to persons who make full disclosure of all the relevant facts relating to acts associated with a political objective and which comply with the requirements of the Act (Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act)”; “establishing and making known the fate or whereabouts of victims and restoring the human and civil dignity of such victims by granting them an opportunity to relate their own accounts

of the violations of which they are victims, and recommending reparation measures in respect of them"; and "Compiling a report providing as comprehensive an account as possible of the activities and findings of the Commission and containing recommendations of measures to prevent the future violations of human rights."²²

The former Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, The Most Reverend Desmond Tutu, chaired the TRC. While the TRC was not perfect, it offered South Africa a path into the future without revenge; an exercise grounded in a search for justice through forgiveness and reconciliation. While describing the agreement to set up the Commission as a political deal, which the African National Congress preferred, Tinyiko Maluleke, in an essay written during the TRC process (chapter 19), explored the work of the Commission from the perspective of the victims. Maluleke argued that the entire process was a search for justice that could not completely undermine the effects of apartheid on the people but offered a theological approach that probed the silences of the marginalized people and invited them to engage in a critical debate on reconciliation as a process of arriving at restorative justice. In a careful reading of the process and role played by both Mandela and Tutu, Maluleke argues that the New South Africa would be judged on whether it enhanced or disrupted the struggles of those who live on the margins of society. Contextual theological perspectives shaped the quest for justice and reconciliation that was necessary for the wellbeing of the country. Archbishop Tutu and Tutu-type theologians such as Beyers Naude, Allan Boesak, Frank Chikane, Brigalia Bam, and Stanley Mogoba all provided spiritual as well as political leadership at a time when the major political groups in the country were banned. Maluleke argued that in the post-apartheid era a new ecumenism was necessary to address the problem of poverty, disease, and gender violence, and the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

In his essay on Pentecostalism in Nigeria (chapter 20), Matthews Ojo argues that mostly young non-professional preachers at Nigerian Universities who preached that one must be born again led the movement that emerged the 1970s and expanded globally. They established prayer groups, and those groups later become independent churches. The leaders stressed baptism of the Holy Spirit, healing, miracles, and material blessings as integral parts of the Christian experience. The growing Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches have attracted the attention of politicians who have courted their political support. Ojo characterizes the movements and groups into faith seekers who focus on evangelism; faith builders who urge people to overcome all difficulties in life; faith transformers who would like to reform the church; the deliverance movements; and the modernists who want the Christian faith a part of an enlightened society. Charismatic Churches hold healing services, deliverance from ancestral curses, preach material prosperity, and emphasize that Christians share in the Abrahamic covenant of blessing. Benson Idahosa of Nigeria was the first evangelist to preach the prosperity gospel in Africa and lived a flamboyant lifestyle.

African Initiated Churches have spread throughout the world as Africans have migrated to different parts of the world. Afe Adogame in chapter 21 argues that the Pentecostal churches in Africa who stress health and wealth do not merely preach an American style prosperity gospel, but draw their ideas on these issues from internal dynamics as they respond to local crisis. The Redeemed Christian Church of God's (RCCG) phenomenal growth represents the transnationalization of African churches

whose internal teachings and practices have develop its teaching on tithing and wealth. The General Overseer of the RCCG, Dr. Adeboye, sees poverty as an illness which one can overcome and describes wealth as a flourishing. The RCCG uses the money generated through tithes and offerings for the work of ministry that includes salaries for its staff and support of the poor and needy in the church.

The next essays focus on Islam in Africa. Yushau Sodiq (chapter 22) discusses Islam in Africa, from its beginning in the Arabian Peninsula in 641 C.E. Cairo became an important Islamic center and the home of Al-Azhar University established in 969 C.E. Islam spread through conquest, trade, educational programs, the promotion of equality, the weakness of the Christian churches in North Africa, the system of indirect rule, and dependence on African hospitality. Sodiq argues that Islam is a communal religion and devotees seek to apply its teaching to all areas of life in society. He discusses significant Islamic feasts celebrated in Africa. Despite its spread, Islam has not destroyed local religions because local spirits, like the Bori and Zar spirits, possess Muslims. African religion has also influenced Islamic practices and now men and women pray together. Sheikh Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio of Sokoto of Nigeria allowed women to attend his classes. Sodiq laments the fact that Muslims see African religions as paganism that must surrender to Islam. On the negative side of the story, Muslims also participated in the slave trade. Women have not been accorded the rights and equality guaranteed to them in Islam. The Prophet had respect for women and sought the advice of women when he was in Medina. In the last section of the chapter, the author argues that Islam does not endorse terrorism and violence.

In her essay on women in Islam (chapter 23), Penda Mbow argues that although women in Senegal have contributed to Islam, the status of women has not changed significantly. Mbow examines the case of Ndiaye Mody Guirandu, a Senegalese woman who has taken the religious vocation. Ndiaye Mody Guirandu has claimed prophetic gifts and inspiration from the Angel Gabriel. She has traced her genealogy back to the Prophet himself and claimed that God called her directly and gave her Sufi teachings to teach others. Despite these claims, Guirandu still subscribes to patriarchy because a male imam leads prayers in her worship place. Guirandu's "case is a perfect example of the possible religious transformations in a society undergoing rapid change. These changes have created new situations for women and religion that cannot be simplified." Senegalese women continue to redefine their role as Muslims in a new social context where the religious leaders still resist changes. Mbow argues that despite the activities of people like Guirandu, one can only understand the plight of women in society in light of the debates on secularism, democracy, liberalization, the long debate on the family code in Senegal, rights, and a careful interpretation of the main texts of the tradition on Islamic law.

Carmen McCain in chapter 24 calls for a contextual analysis of modernity by exploring modernities in Hausa society, which is connected to the wider world through Islam, thus making the coming of Islam to the Kanem Borno area a modernizing event. McCain argues that Uthman Dan Fodio's reforms imposed core Islamic values in a modernist project that did not repeal all restrictions on women because he taught women to protect their honor, stay at home, and not socialize with men. Islamic modernity had ambivalent outcomes for women even though some powerful Hausa Queens

ruled in Zaria, and the daughters of the Shehu established administrative positions in the areas he conquered and collected taxes for the state. McCain also argues that colonialism which masqueraded as modernity did not change the situation of women and if anything, colonial modernity contributed to the reversal of positive achievements of women's issues under the Shehu. The colonial government educated boys first and later opened schools for girls, but it was only later reform movements like *Yan Izala* that promoted education for both sexes. Today artists use films and fiction to address contradictions in the lives of people who appear on the surface to be religious but who still oppress women. Modernism in the Hausa area is not a one-time revolution, but a series of engagements that affects culture over the *longue durée*.

Two of the most volatile subjects in African Islam that also receive attention from non-Muslims are *jihad* and *shari'a*. In chapter 25, John Hanson refocuses the notion of *jihad* and defines it as striving, effort, or struggle, although it has been used to reflect a wide range of views from non-violent activity to violence and war. Although early legal scholars might have used it to justify struggle, limiting *jihad* to armed conflict and holy warfare is not representative of the meanings of the term. Hanson traces interpretations of *jihad* in early Islamic texts and in African history and argues that the term appears thirty times in the Qur'an and is discussed in the *ahadiths*, and studies of the Prophet. Some see *jihad* as a confrontation with a tyrannical ruler with the word. In the *ahadiths* references are made to war, but even in those texts, the inner struggle with one's soul is still considered the greater *jihad*. Some early Islamic jurists sanctioned the use of *jihad* to relate to warfare, even though the notion of *jiad al-nafs* has consistently appeared in the work of scholars going back to Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. Hanson's analysis restores the view that *jihad* is a spiritual confrontation.

David Cook in chapter 26 argues that *shari'a* law is "the sum total of the life-example (*sunna*) of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions, as narrated through the tradition (*hadith*), . . . codified through the discussions of jurisprudents (who themselves are organized into four legal rights: *maliki*, *hanifi*, *shafi'i* and *hanbali*), and manifested from a practical point of view through the medium of the *fatwa* (legal opinion)." Some who debate *shari'a* have not paid attention to the *modus operandi* of such a thoroughgoing religious lifestyle but pay attention to aspects of it. In East Africa some emphasize the *shaif'i* legal rite while in Sudan some link the *shari'a* with the *Mahdi* (the Messianic figure). President Ja'far al-Numayri and his successor Umar al-Bashir promoted *shari'a*, with a rapid arabization of African Muslims. In Nigeria, supporters of *shari'a* invoke the reforms of Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio (1754–1817), who represents the golden period of Islamic rule. *Shari'a* law has caused conflicts because non-Muslims reject it.

Until recently, people who talked about religious diversity in Africa emphasized only indigenous religions, Christianity, and Islam, even though many of the world's religions have found a home in Africa. One example of what is also an African religion is Hinduism. In chapter 27, P. Pratap Kumar discusses Hinduism in South Africa. The progenitors of Asians in South Africa arrived as indentured servants with many of them practicing Hindus. Indians in South Africa came from different backgrounds and some Gujarati-speaking Hindus kept some of their class distinctions and culture while Hindus who came from rural backgrounds practiced rituals they observed back home. Where

Brahmanical cultures exist, they practiced the Hindu religion informed by Sanskrit ritual texts. The Tamil- and Telugu-speaking Hindus also kept their practices, including the worship of the feminine principle and Mother goddess. The early priests who served these communities also came to South Africa as indentured servants. Hindu worship grew and temples reflecting north and south Indian architectural styles now grace the religious landscape. The author also discusses philosophical developments, reform movements, and practices of a variety of rituals and new Hindu movements like the Arya Samaj movement. The 1994 Constitution granted religious freedoms to all people in the society and as a result, new movements have come up including the Satya Sai movement associated with a leader by that name who emerged in the 1970s in India. The Ramakrishna Mission and the Divine Life Society are also new movements in South Africa.

In Part III, "Religion, Culture, and Society," the authors explore the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary nature of religion in Africa by exploring the religious dimension of different intellectual and cultural phenomena. In this section, the authors provide insights that demonstrate that the religious experience can be understood with great depth if one examines that experience from interrelated disciplines and cultural products. This section begins with Suzanne Blier's essay on religion and art in Ile-Ife (chapter 28). Blier walks the reader through the shrines and groves, and gives the reader an insight into the sculptures with religious significance in Ile-Ife. Arts are symbols of empowerment in this most ancient and holy city of the Yorubas. Blier connects visual images with empowerment because it connects one to the supernatural whose "sight" is necessary to see the objects. Some of the sculptures from Ile-Ife emphasize the eyes using color, chalk, and linear forms to give the impression that the sculptures themselves can see, but more importantly, the work is an *imole* (sacred power), a mystical power, that could also be dangerous.

Blier points out that many of the sculptures that go back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were created as memorials to kings, queens, warriors, priests, hunters, court servants, who are now respected for their service. Some of the works were placed in shrines, some displayed in special groves. One important Ile-Ife grove was the Ore Grove that was dedicated to Oreluere, believed to have lived in the area when Oduduwa lived there. Shrines were also found in the interior of palaces, and the temples, public altars, and groves. Art objects were also placed in inner chambers and some facing the cardinal points. "During the Ife Obatala festival today, stone figures representing Obatala and his consort Yemoo are covered with a white cloth and bound tightly with cord before being transported to a special shrine across town. Here, after being unwrapped, the works are placed in a 'niche' where they are the focus of prayers by prostrating participants." These are clear indications that there is an "interdependence of religious ritual and viewing."

Allen Roberts and Mary Nooter Roberts, in chapter 29, use the Sufi arts of Senegal to explore saintly life as exemplified by Sheikh Amadou Bamba. Based on their hugely successful interdisciplinary exhibit of Sufi arts, the Roberts discuss an encounter with Islam through the works of contemporary artists in Senegal. Islam was brought to Senegal in the tenth century and Sufism gained a footing in the eighteenth century and thus started a long tradition of Sufi learning. Sheikh Amadou Bamba's Sufi teachings

enchanted the people, because he used his saintly virtues to focus on the poor, promoted discipline and hard work, and emphasized the jihad of the soul as the true jihad. Bamba's hard work, perseverance, resistance, and accommodation, a belief in divine intervention through miracles, endeared Bamba to the people. The saintly status of Bamba as one who brings *Baraka* (blessing) is best captured in the arts that have grown out of the single picture that was taken of Bamba in 1913. *Taalibe*, artists like Moustapha Dimé, followed the Bamba tradition and created work considered ennobling of women. He described work as prayer and spirituality that brings freedom to the practice of Islam in a way that transcends the mundane. He dedicates his work to God because it is a union with God. Viyé Diba also brings artists like Moussa Tine to use art to seek a path to divine knowledge. Artist Ndary Lo brought an international perspective in 2006 with an installation that honored Rosa Parks whose refusal to move to the back of the bus sparked the Montgomery bus boycott in the United States. In an installation titled "The bones of My Ancestors," he attempts to depict many Africans who lost their lives in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Sufi arts centered on Bamba are a praxis that celebrates creativity, beauty, effervescence, divine presence, and a nationalist spirit, although Bamba himself was not a nationalist.

Religious scholarship in Africa has addressed health issues in many ways, including the numerous studies of HIV and the AIDS pandemic. While the authors do not address HIV and AIDS specifically in this volume, they demonstrate how health and hence epidemics are intertwined with many issues, especially the economy. James R. Cochrane, in chapter 30, discusses religion, health, and the economy of the concrete human body, which often hurts, is abused, and mutilated in different ways, and is subjected to poverty. Therefore, scholars of religion cannot afford to ignore these issues since they relate to human experience, religious thought, and practice. Religious traditions address economic matters by inscribing norms for its followers. Cochrane discusses religion and economic life by analyzing the body and health in relationship to other issues like the global economy, movement of people, development, and marginalization. Human bodies are mobile, interactive, and are subjected to human experiences in different spaces where one experiences *bophelo*, a notion of wellbeing that includes the self and community.

Cochrane examines four perspectives: "home bodies, moving bodies, desiring bodies, and healthy bodies." The idea of *bophelo* places the person in a home, a space for the individual and family where patterns of production and reproduction are carried out. However, it is a location where ethical practices like hospitality are carried out. It is a place where the sacred brings together people in the *oikos*, which combined with *nomos*, give us the word economics, the management of the household. Secondly, bodies are also moving bodies. Here Cochrane refers to a place where remittances oscillate as local, and transnational religious ideas are employed to transform and provide security in the new context, or sustain an already existing place. Religion is used to fuel the desire to connect to global consumer attitude. The final perspective Cochrane discusses is on healthy bodies, utilizing the notion of capabilities and the social determinants of health. One's social economic status gives us information about how the community has employed its capabilities and capacities to achieve wellbeing.

Addressing illness also, David Westerlund in chapter 31 highlights the complex relationship between illnesses and healing, pointing out that Edward Evans-Pritchard once claimed that the search for wellbeing is a central component of the religious experience in Africa. Westerlund argues that the Maasai and Turkana of East Africa think that illness also comes from natural causes as well as malevolent forces of witches, sorcerers, and sometimes by ancestors who have been ignored. People who attribute illness to supernatural forces still take medicines. The San people maintain that God allows illness to come through an intermediary and is not a punishment for sin or wrong-doing because personal wrongs are adjudicated and resolved in the community. Other San groups, the Nharo in the Ghanzi district of western Botswana, believe that human agents also cause illness. They classify afflictions into three main categories: “Bushmen diseases,” cured through trance dances, “Bantu diseases,” caused by witchery, and “European diseases,” that is, new organic ailments such as tuberculosis. For treatment of “foreign” illnesses, Nharo depend on foreign specialists. The Sukuma people believe illness is caused by *bulogi* (witchcraft) and when one suspects that, he or she will consult a diviner and also seek the help of *baqumu* (healers). Africans, including those infected with the HIV virus, continue to seek healing from traditional healers, although Zulu healers now regard HIV and AIDS as a new illness which they cannot heal. Some traditional healers have received training on how to deal with HIV-positive people. It is a challenging time to be a healer but Nharo healers are fighting to stay in business by using therapeutic dances.

One area of religious life scholars study or examine as part of other broad analyses of religion is the relationship of religion and power, or politics. Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar (chapter 32) address the scholarly interest in religion and power noting that African epistemologies do not distinguish between the invisible realm of power and the social historical world. Religious experience involves “a belief in the existence of an invisible world, distinct but not separate from the visible one, that is home to spiritual beings with effective powers over the material world.” These are morally neutral, value-free terms, and establish broad categories for religion. When people think of power they include “power to prosper, to be fertile and productive, and simply to live.” Power is also necessary to relate to the invisible world in order to shape the present state and map their future destiny. Attempts to redefine how religion relates to politics are still problematic because the combination of spiritual and political activities such as Alice Lakwena’s Holy Spirit Movement and Joseph Kony’s Lord Resistance Army, have been deadly. Techniques, like the Kamajors of Sierra Leone and the Mai-Mai of Congo with their supposedly bulletproof amulets offer new ways of harnessing power in the postcolonial state. Forces like witchcraft remain important aspects of conceptualizing power. Concepts like progress and development remain interesting religious issues that invite open-ended conversations that would take African epistemologies seriously, demonstrate a critical appreciation to the connections Africans make about the invisible source of power and the management of socio-political and economic realities.

In chapter 33, Steve de Gruchy provides a background and critical analysis of the United Nations Millennium Declaration issued at the end of the UN Millennium Summit (UNMS) of 6–8 September 2000, pointing out that the Summiteers expressed

a determination to make globalization work for all people. They noted that combating global problems called for freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, and shared responsibility. The final declaration focused on peace, security and disarmament, development, the eradication of poverty, protecting a common environment, human rights, democratic rule, and good governance. Other issues receiving great attention were eliminating of all discrimination against women and migrant workers; the end of racism and xenophobia; and respect for press freedoms. De Gruchy argues that overall, gender issues and development issues were not adequately addressed. Thinking about development still takes a western linear perspective, which separates history from nature. It is important to rethink development by asking who really benefits. Effective development involves freedom so that the people are active participants in process.

In chapter 34, Rosalind Hackett examines religion, media, and conflicts in Africa, a relatively new field of study that has attracted ethnographic and phenomenological analysis by scholars of religion. Hackett highlights public policies, control of the media, commercialization, inequitable access, consumerism, and use of media for defamation activities. Hackett laments the effects of increasing deregulation, Christianization, Pentecostalization, and evangelicalization of the media in Africa. These developments are “influencing . . . [and] generating . . . new patterns of religious and cultural intolerance.” It is necessary to continue to probe the links and power connections forged through the media to understand new processes of identity construction, boundary marking by communities, and new perspectives on the othering. Although hegemonic use of broadcast media creates alienation and sets the conditions for violence, the media could be the avenue for redressing problems in society. Four areas give rise to conflict in the relationship between the broadcast media and religion. First, inequitable access exists, for example, in Egypt where the Coptic Church is just getting access to broadcast media and in Ghana where Pentecostals dominate the media. Secondly, the media seems to be out of control and overreaches its boundaries making some think that Pentecostal messages presented even by visiting evangelists like Reinhard Bonnke are a form of displacement. Third, the media promotes competition for converts, and ministers do not shy away from defamatory and demonization language as they compete. Fourth, media developments in Africa are driven by commercialism and entertainment. Hackett calls for the right use of communication theories to raise critical questions about appropriate use of the media to produce culturally useful programs.

Damaris Seleina Parsitau, in chapter 35, discusses gospel, contemporary, and commercialized Christian music in Kenya. The dividing line between secular and sacred music has been blurred because contemporary Christian and Gospel music in Kenya today sounds like pop music and gospel musicians are looked up to as stars of secular music. The music appeals to youths in different denominations and can be understood as popular entertaining music with religious lyrics. Some secular musicians have also started to play and record Christian and gospel music as a business. Overall, Contemporary Christian and Gospel music in Kenya today is a hybrid that draws from both western and African traditions. Parsitau also leads the reader through the changes that have situated contemporary Christian music at the top of the charts, how much of the influence of the music has entered Kenyan political discourses, and the artists being paid to promote commercial products.

Asonzeh Ukah in chapter 36 discusses religion and globalization, a practice he argues is new as it is old. The idea of globalization picked up supporters in the twilight of the twentieth century, but there have also been some dissenting voices on the usefulness of the concept. Globalization refers to events and processes that have come to shape and define global interconnectedness involving “peoples, goods—including destructive military hardware—images and other cultural items, money, life-style, ideas circulate around the world with relative ease and rapidity that is difficult to monitor, control or stop.” Anthony Giddens described globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.”²³ Peter Henriot presents four stages of globalization in Africa: the slave period, the colonial invasion, the neo-liberal period, and the very stage of globalization itself.²⁴ During these periods, (except for a reprieve during the neo-colonial period) Africans have moved to other lands. However, Ukah argues that since religion constitutes “cultural flows,” Africa is part of globalization because the growth and intensification of African religious communities in the diaspora is part of an on-going global movement.

One aspect of life that is contested in the African religious context today is the place of same sex relations. Some African religious leaders claim that same sex relationship has never been part of African culture. The controversy has become a serious issue recently because of the treatment gays and lesbians have received in Zimbabwe, where they were blamed for the problems of the country by that country’s longtime president Robert Mugabe. In Cameroon, many members of the gay community have been arrested and locked up, without being charged with any crime. The former Anglican Archbishop of Nigeria, the Most Reverend Peter Akinola, has led a group that is threatening to break away from the Anglican Communion because the United States Episcopal Church ordained an open homosexual, the Reverend Gene Robinson. The articulations in these debates have risen to the point where they are clearly homophobic. However, the extreme organized opposition to same sex relationships focused on the draft bill in the Ugandan Parliament that would make same sex relations a capital offence. Mounting global opposition forced the Parliament to drop the bill, but not before one of its main opponents and Gay Rights activists was killed.

In his essay on same sex relationships in Africa (chapter 37), Marc Epprecht, who has studied sexuality in the African context, addresses the question of same sex relationship. Epprecht avoids reactionary scholarship and places the debate in a broader context, drawing from his research to discuss the issues within a historical and contemporary phenomenology of sexuality. Epprecht successfully unveils the reality of same sex relations in the context of religious, social, and political contexts in Zimbabwe, arguing: “traditional religions were in fact less dogmatically intolerant of, and indeed sometimes quite respectful toward, sexual difference than is frequently claimed.” Homosexual activity was seen as ambivalence or was seen as experimentation by young men who spent many hours with cattle, but it was always thought this was something they would outgrow. If members of the community thought it was caused by some spirit, it was seen as something that ought to be treated by a healer. Sometimes people engaged in same sex relations that were described as accidental; meaning that men slept together on one bed and one of them experienced an arousal. If sexual activity

took place in that context, it was not treated as seriously as it would be treated otherwise. However, when individuals knowingly carried out homosexual activity, they were punished severely because it was believed that homosexual acts could pollute the earth. Epprecht's research shows that homosexuality might have been criticized and prohibited, but it was not taken to Zimbabwe from some other part of the world. Same sex relations are not a lifestyle that has been imposed on Africa as opponents claim.

These essays offer a snapshot of religious experience for our time and lay the ground for further critique and future analysis. The idea here has not been to be exhaustive, but to be provocative and invite further research, reflection, and dialogue on these issues that many in the African context hold so dearly.

Notes

- 1 I thank Rosalind Hackett and Birgit Meyer for giving me feedback on an earlier draft.
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- 3 Paul Tillich. *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 8.
- 4 T.O. Ranger and I.N. Kimambo, eds. *The Historical Study of African Religions*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).
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- 14 Eva Evers Rosander and David Westerlund, eds. *African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters Between Sufis and Islamists*. (Athens, OH.: Ohio University Press, 1991).
- 15 Frieder Ludwig and Afe Adogame, eds. *European Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa*. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004).
- 16 Scott S. Reese, ed. *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*. (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

- 17 See A. Abble et al. *Des Prêtres noirs s'interrogent*. (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956); Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth, eds. *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).
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- 19 Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, eds. *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992).
- 20 Jan Vansina. *Oral Tradition as History*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Isidore Okpwwho. *African Oral Literature*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).
- 21 See Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Cape Town: Justice in Transition, 1996.
- 22 P. 5, 6.
- 23 Anthony Giddens. *The Consequences of Modernity*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 64.
- 24 Peter J. Henriot. "Globalization: Implications for Africa." In *Globalization and the Power: Exploitation or Equalizer?* Ed. William Driscoll and Julie Clark. (New York: International Debate Education Association, 2003), pp. 46–56.

PART I

Methodological Perspectives on African Religions

CHAPTER 1

Methodological Views on African Religions

James L. Cox

When I first began lecturing in the University of Zimbabwe in 1989, I noticed after a few classes that students had warmed to a method of studying African Traditional Religions that drew on concepts derived from the phenomenology of religion. In fact, my students became so enamored with the phenomenological method in the study of religion that often they wrote in their essays that phenomenology is *the* way; some said the *only* way, to study religions, particularly African religions. I now explain this overwhelmingly positive response by Zimbabwean students to the phenomenological method by the fact that many had been pupils in mission schools, or at least were active Christians, who had been taught that the indigenous religion of their ancestors was demonic and that they should have nothing to do with traditional rituals. When they began to see that for academic reasons they should suspend such judgments, even if they maintained them personally, and should employ empathetic techniques to gain an understanding of any religion they were studying, it was as if a veil had been removed from their eyes, and they could view their own religious and cultural practices in a new light.

I refer at the outset to my Zimbabwean students because their experience of studying their own cultures using a basic understanding of phenomenological principles underscores at a deeper level two inter-related methodological questions I wish to consider: 1) What, if anything, can the phenomenological method, which has been much maligned in scholarly writings over the past twenty years, offer to contemporary understandings of African religions? 2) In light of the phenomenological method in the study of religion, as “insiders” to their own cultures, do African scholars have an inherent advantage over non-African researchers of African religions? The first question focuses on the phenomenology of religion in general and the second considers a phenomenological interpretation of the relative value of “insider” discourse. These questions relate to the study of all African religions, but I have chosen to exemplify my responses in the latter part of this article largely in terms of indigenous beliefs and practices. Before

I turn to these considerations, however, I need to outline the key principles underlying the phenomenology of religion and respond to some of the most persistent criticisms levelled at it by scholars of religion.¹

The Phenomenology of Religion

The three most important concepts found within the phenomenology of religion are *epoché*, empathetic interpolation and the eidetic intuition. Derived from the philosophy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century German philosopher Edmund Husserl, the term *epoché* was used by Husserl to suspend all judgments associated with what he called the natural attitude (which naively assumes that what is observed tells us all there is to know about the world) such as material things, science, other humans, and the sequence and order of events. All the things we take for granted about what we perceive as real, to use a term Husserl borrowed from mathematics, must be “put into brackets.” In solving algebraic equations, for example, the mathematician places the various components of the formula into brackets and works on solving each problem placed in brackets one at a time so that, at the conclusion, each limited solution can be applied to resolving the problem of the entire equation. In a similar way, although Husserl did not use the *epoché* to doubt the existence of the external world, he suspended judgments about it so that, like a mathematician, attention could be focused on another part of the equation, in this case, on an analysis of the phenomena of perception as they appear in the individual’s consciousness. The effect of this method, according to Husserl, was to establish a new mode of consciousness in which the natural standpoint is put out of play or, as Husserl put it, performing *epoché* “bars me from using any judgment that concerns spatio-temporal existence.”² By placing in brackets previously held beliefs or assumptions derived from the natural standpoint, the observer allows pure phenomena to speak for themselves.

Following Husserl, phenomenologists of religion advocated a method of bracketing out or suspending a researcher’s previous ideas, thoughts or beliefs about the truth, value or meaning of any religion under study. Phenomenologists wanted to observe the phenomena of religion as they appear, rather than as they are understood through opinions formed prior to their being observed. This means suspending *personal beliefs* and withholding judgements on *academic theories* about religion. A leading advocate of the method was the Dutch phenomenologist Gerardus van der Leeuw who followed closely Husserl’s philosophical rejection of the natural attitude. Van der Leeuw described *epoché* as a tool to ensure “that no judgment is expressed concerning the objective world, which is thus placed ‘between brackets’.”³ He explained that this requires the scholar to observe “restraint” by allowing only the phenomena that appear to manifest themselves, rather than the observer relying on presuppositions about what lies “behind” appearances.⁴ In van der Leeuw’s understanding, performing *epoché* should not be regarded as an effort to remove the observer from interacting creatively with the phenomena. The mind in its bracketed consciousness is not a blank tablet but, based on Husserl’s rendering of the term intentionality, is employed precisely to enable the observer to interpret the phenomena as they appear, liberated from naïve or unchal-

lenged assumptions. Because it eliminated potentially distorting biases, for van der Leeuw, *epoché* enabled the observer to attain understanding of the subjective nature of religion (its internal structure) and its objective meaning (its broader connections).

Another important phenomenologist of religion was W. Brede Kristensen, under whom van der Leeuw studied in Leiden University. Although his major work in English on theory and method in the study of religion, *The Meaning of Religion*, was not published until 1960, seven years after his death, his influence within the study of religions during the first half of the twentieth century was considerable.⁵ Despite the fact that he did not employ the term *epoché* in *The Meaning of Religion*, Kristensen began by insisting that the scholar must call into question any interpretation of religion that is potentially offensive to believers. He argued that a genuinely scientific understanding occurs only when the scholar is able to see through the viewpoint or perspective of adherents, since believers understand their own religion better than anyone from the outside ever could. In order to gain an insider's perspective, the scholar needs to suspend widely accepted presuppositions about the origin and meaning of religion. Kristensen believed that evolutionary theories in particular predisposed the scholar to evaluate religions from the outside and thus, in the words of Eric Sharpe, "to have been responsible for inducing scholars to pass premature judgment on material they had learned to understand only in part."⁶ By applying evolutionary assumptions to religion, the outside researcher produces an entirely biased interpretation to which believers could never accede. Kristensen concluded: "All evolutionary views and theories . . . mislead us from the start."⁷ Van der Leeuw later used Husserl's term *epoché* to reinforce Kristensen's emphasis on the authority of believers to interpret their own religion.

A second key concept in the phenomenological method is what van der Leeuw called "sympathetic interpolation," which he defined as "the primitively human art of the actor which is indispensable to all arts, but to the sciences of the mind also" adding that "only the persistent and strenuous application of intense sympathy . . . qualifies the phenomenologist to interpret appearances."⁸ The British phenomenologist of religion, Ninian Smart, preferred the term empathy to sympathy, which he explained, following Husserl's notion of intentionality, enabled the observer to recognise "a framework of intentions" among the believers.⁹ Intentionality, for Smart, not only required the active involvement of the researcher but also included the acts of a believing community (what it intends by its myths, rituals, and symbols), which must be apprehended by the observer if genuine understanding is to be achieved. The twin processes of using empathy and interpolating what is experienced into terms the researcher can comprehend defined for Smart how intentionality operates in a dual manner: first, by enabling the scholar to access the meaning of the religious life and practices for adherents and then by making sense of them intentionally in terms of the researcher's own culture.

The Canadian scholar of comparative religions, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, argued forcefully for this approach. In his popular book, *The Faith of Other Men*,¹⁰ subsequently re-printed under the title *Patterns of Faith around the World*,¹¹ Smith provided examples of empathetic interpolation by selecting key symbols which he used to help interpret to outsiders the meaning of faith for adherents within four different religious and cultural traditions: Hindus, Buddhists, the Chinese and Muslims. For Hindus, Smith identified the central symbol as the Sanskrit expression "*tat tvam asi*," which he translated into

English as “that thou art.”¹² This terse statement points towards a deep religious truth affirming the identity of the individual soul (*Atman*) with the universal world spirit (*Brahman*). Smith explained that for Hindus “the individual self is the world soul” and thus “each one of you reading this book” is “in some final, cosmic sense, the total and transcendent truth that underlies all being.”¹³ Smith interpolated this difficult and seemingly contradictory idea for the western mind by suggesting that in the areas of art, morality, and theology people in European cultures, steeped as they are in Greek thought, seek a correspondence between what they appreciate esthetically, do morally or believe ultimately and what *really is* Beautiful, Good, and True. The unity sought between what the individual experiences and what is universal is familiar to the western mind and thus interpolates empathetically what has often appeared enigmatic for westerners within the Hindu tradition. Smith does the same in the Buddhist tradition by describing a boys’ initiation rite practiced in Burma called the *Shin Byu* ceremony,¹⁴ within the Chinese tradition by exploring the significance of the *Yin-Yang* symbols of opposition and complementarity,¹⁵ and for Muslims by explaining the *Shahadah* or testimony of faith, “There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet.”¹⁶ In each case, Smith draws from the everyday experiences common in western culture to help westerners gain an appreciation for and an understanding of what otherwise might appear incomprehensible, strange or even wrong in other religious traditions.

Ninian Smart exemplified this process when he asked his reader to consider the life and behaviour of Adolf Hitler, who for most people represents a historical figure with whom it would appear impossible to empathize or to cultivate a feeling for.¹⁷ Smart asks, “Does it mean that I need to be a Hitler-lover to understand him?” In one sense, Smart answers this question affirmatively: “If we are indeed to get into his soul we have to drop our preconceptions, and treat Hitler as a human being who had his own thought world.” This involves following him “through his Austrian childhood and relationship to his father and dear mother; through his scholastic failures and outcast status in Vienna; through his years in the trenches fighting in France.” In other words, Smart calls on us to treat Adolf Hitler as a human being, but, he adds, “All this is strictly *empathy*, ‘getting the feel of’.” Empathy, he argues, does not require a person to condone Hitler’s actions or approve “in any way the rightness of his creed.” Smart concludes: “So we can still deplore his deeds once we have understood them.” This example shows that for phenomenologists of religion it is always possible to cultivate a feeling for anything human in order to induce understanding. Under the procedure of *epoché*, it is irrelevant whether or not scholars of religion are able to endorse the beliefs and practices of the communities they are seeking to understand.

A third key component in the phenomenological method is at the same time probably the most controversial: the eidetic intuition. Again, this idea is obtained from Husserl who used the phrase, which he derived from the Greek *eidos* meaning form, idea, or essence, to see into the meaning of the phenomena encountered while in the state of bracketed consciousness or *epoché*. By the eidetic intuition Husserl meant that the observer is able to apprehend not just particular entities or even universal classes of entities but their essential meanings as entities and classes of entities. This can occur only when one’s preconceived notions are suspended, thereby enabling the observer to intuit the meaning of what actually manifests itself in the world. Husserl explains:

The multiplicity of possible perceptions, memories, and, indeed, intentional processes of whatever sort, that relate, or can relate, “harmoniously” to one and the same physical thing has (in all its tremendous complication) a quite definite essential style.¹⁸

For Husserl, the combination of *epoché* and the eidetic intuition were required for the building up of an objective picture of the phenomena of existence. *Epoché* allows the observer to suspend theories of the world built on naturalistic assumptions, what Husserl calls the “fact world,” in order that consciousness, which forms the basis for all knowledge, can be analyzed rigorously. In this way, the observer perceives the world as it comes fresh from the phenomena and is able thereby to intuit new realities or at least achieve a more complete understanding of reality than had been attained previously.

An important and influential figure in the academic study of religions throughout the latter third of the twentieth century was Mircea Eliade, who occupied the Chair of the History of Religions in the University of Chicago from 1958 until his death in 1986. Eliade’s writings cover a wide range of topics from Shamanism to Australian Aboriginal Religions, but his chief contribution to theory and method resulted from his hermeneutical approach to the study of religions, an approach I have argued elsewhere is fully consistent with the phenomenology of religion.¹⁹ I am calling Eliade’s interpretation of the meaning of religion a prime example of what I mean by the eidetic intuition, although Eliade did not explicitly use the term, nor did he directly rely on Husserl in his writings, although clearly he was aware of Husserl’s understanding of the *eidos*.²⁰ Nonetheless, Eliade constructed a general theory of religion which he believed applied in all cultural and social contexts, and thus can be regarded as providing a statement about the universal essence of religion.

For Eliade, the key word that helps the scholar unlock the meaning of religion is the “hierophany,” the manifestation of the sacred, which locates for the religious person (*homo religiosus*) points of orientation around sacred centers. Eliade contended that the sacred is unknown and unknowable in itself, but is revealed through manifestations in profane space and time.²¹ Hence, hierophanies are mundane, worldly objects which become the avenues for making known to humans what otherwise would remain utterly incomprehensible. As such, these manifestations, the hierophanies, constitute the subject matter of the history of religions. In his important book, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Eliade explained that hierophanies reveal a “paradoxical coming together of sacred and profane, being and non-being, absolute and relative, the eternal and the becoming.”²²

In what is arguably his most influential book outlining his theory of religion, *The Sacred and the Profane* (which significantly carries the sub-title, “The nature of religion”), Eliade asks his reader to imagine a time when there were no hierophanies, no sacred intrusions in space and time.²³ He calls this the chaos created by a profane homogeneity, where everything is the same, where no points of orientation can be located.²⁴ This is equivalent to being lost, where a person cannot identify any familiar landmarks and experiences utter despair and hopelessness as a result. In like manner, for the religious person, homogeneity, the inability to detect sacred points of orientation, results in a sense of absolute meaninglessness and total chaos. In the mythic beginnings of history, when space and time were undifferentiated, for religious people, the sacred manifested itself creating meaningful points of orientation. Stories about

these primordial hierophanies are told within different religious traditions in their cosmogonic myths, which in turn are re-enacted in rituals.

Because religion primarily is about orientation, certain symbols recur in various forms throughout the world and across history. These primarily have to do with cosmic centers, which connect the layers of the world, the upper levels reaching to the heavens and hence to the gods and the lower levels extending to the foundations of the earth. As such, stories about the sacred are often associated with the sky and are symbolized by mountains, trees, birds, the sun, and the moon. Ritual attention frequently is focused around the symbols, which are transmitted in the myths, and thus rituals transport the religious community repeatedly into a time of beginning when the world was “founded.” This explains why for Eliade hierophanies, as told in myths and re-enacted in rituals, provide the key concept for interpreting religion universally.²⁵

It should now be evident from my description of the key elements in the phenomenology of religion that, as a method, it aims to promote understanding of religions in particular and of religion in general. Its techniques also attempt to bridge the gap between the subject and the object of religion, the observer and those that are observed, by drawing on common human ways of thinking which can be translated into multiple cultural contexts and individual inter-subjective experiences. The phenomenology of religion also seeks to alert the scholar to potentially distorting biases and unexamined assumptions (both personal and academic) in order that these do not predetermine the outcomes of research in advance.

Criticisms of the Phenomenological Method and a Rebuttal

During the period from around 1950 to 1980, the phenomenology of religion, including its application to historical studies in Eliadean terms, was probably the dominant method employed by scholars of religion. Since 1980, a mounting critique of the method has occurred, which has undermined its influence and, in the view of many contemporary writers, has made it irrelevant to contemporary studies of religion. If this consensus holds, of course, the questions with which I began this article investigating the application of the method within African religions are anachronistic. I want to counter this position by arguing that the declaration of the death of phenomenology is premature and that it provides still a cutting-edge approach to the study of religions with implications for new understandings of African religions. Before discussing the African context, however, I must rehearse some of the principal objections to the phenomenology of religion and respond to them briefly.

One of the main criticisms of phenomenology centers on its claim that by using empathy it can enter into specific religious contexts in order to gain a universal understanding of religious typologies and more generally on the basis of typological comparisons to ascertain the meaning of religion. According to the scholar of Hinduism Gavin Flood, this is a problem that the phenomenology of religion inherited from Edmund Husserl, who maintained that the individual consciousness is at the same time both particular and universal. The individual consciousness operates under the limitations imposed by being an individual consciousness, but at the same time it assumes

a universal form of rationality. In other words, in Husserl's view, the observer, although particular and individual, asserts a common understanding of the world with others, or obtains intersubjectivity, through empathy. In the phenomenology of religion, this same process operates when the subjective observer, in this case the scholar of religion, is able to penetrate into the inner meaning of religious facts. This, according to Flood, has resulted in the overriding emphasis among phenomenologists on subjective states, conveyed in terms of numinous experience, faith, or inner enlightenment. Flood argues that this can be seen clearly in the case of Eliade, where religion is construed in terms of the observer's ability to feel "as if" one were religious by entering into the mind of the religious person. For Flood, this turns the study of religion into a study of the structure of the religious "consciousness" because it is wed to the idea it imported from Husserl that "assumes the universality of the rational subject . . . who can, through objectification, have access to a truth external to any particular historical and cultural standpoint."²⁶

In response to Flood, I would emphasize the word "interpolate," the second part of van der Leeuw's phrase, "sympathetic interpolation." Sympathy (or empathy), considered by itself, can be regarded as an entirely subjective tool that depends on the ability of the individual observer to "enter into" or "cultivate a feeling" for that which otherwise would appear unusual, bizarre, or alien to one's own understanding. For example, in his discussion of Australian Aboriginal cultures, Tony Swain has argued that "it is easy to be deluded into believing we have gained an empathic understanding of other people's religious life, when in fact we have merely seen ourselves reflected in their culture."²⁷ Nonetheless, as Smart demonstrated in his example of Hitler, to interpolate suggests that we insert consciously our own experience into the experience of the other on the assumption that nothing human ultimately is alien to other humans, since everywhere humans think alike, although the way thoughts are expressed culturally and socially differs dramatically. For this reason, it is possible to use one's own experience as an interpretative tool to gain an understanding of the experience of another. That is, one can interpolate out of one's own cultural setting meanings that help the student of religion, as an outsider, understand what occurs in another, seemingly alien, cultural context.

In one sense, Flood's objection cannot be answered since consciousness is accessible only to the one performing acts of consciousness. This means that the process of interpolation, which is based on the assumption that other minds operate in roughly the same fashion as one's own, cannot be tested. It is based on a "feeling for" the other and resulted in Husserl's attempt to overcome solipsism (the view that the individual consciousness is all that can be known to exist) through an alleged intersubjectivity between independent minds. In a like manner, phenomenologists of religion secure understanding of religious practices with which they are unfamiliar by appealing to a common humanity. In other words, even though the eyes of faith are denied to the scholar of religion, it is possible to imagine what it would be like to possess a vision based on faith.

Although solipsism can never be disproved, it remains an untenable philosophical position since a theory of knowledge can never proceed without the assumption that other minds experience the world in similar ways.²⁸ For this reason, Husserl can hardly

be faulted for asserting common patterns of human thought which can be ascertained through assumed intersubjective experiences. In a like manner, the phenomenologist of religion takes for granted that religious people have shared ways of expressing their beliefs and practices, understanding of which can be penetrated through a combination of empathy and interpolation. This means that the phenomenologist often refers to numinous experiences or, following Eliade, describes the longing of the religious person to be as near the sacred as possible in time and space, through myths and rituals.²⁹ These represent scholarly interpretations generated by a careful analysis of data, but at the same time ones that are provoked by a subjective empathy. Such interpretations give insight into how the religious mind operates, or better, how the mind operates when it perceives the world religiously. So, in one sense Flood is correct when he argues that the phenomenologist of religion conceives the world by projecting the numinous experience of the believer onto the data. This is done nonetheless in the interests of objectivity, that is, to disclose the way the religious mind functions as part of a shared human way of thinking, but which at the same time is expressed in multiple ways in specific social and cultural contexts.

This leads to a second major criticism levelled at the phenomenology of religion. Phenomenologists of religion repeatedly insisted that religion exists as an entity in itself, or as a classification *sui generis*, which requires specific methodological tools unique to its subject matter that are quite separate from any operating within the social sciences. For example, in his book on Australian religions, Eliade commends the work of the anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner precisely because Stanner “protests against the general notion that a study of totemism, magic, and ritual exhausts the understanding of primitive religion.”³⁰ He then cites with approval the anti-reductionist position of Stanner, whom he commends for criticizing “the fallacious presupposition ‘that the social order is in some sense causal, and the religious order secondary and in some sense consequential’.”³¹ It is the fervent anti-reductionist stance of most phenomenologists that has brought charges from many scholars that the phenomenology of religion is ideologically based and therefore more akin to theology than to genuine scientific disciplines.

Following this line of thinking, Robert Segal of the University of Aberdeen has launched a stinging criticism of the phenomenology of religion.³² In particular, Segal has attacked Eliade for confusing the study of religion in its own right with religious faith and thus of moving out of science into theology. Segal accuses Eliade of adopting a faith stance through his contention that the central component in religion is the sacred that believing communities apprehend through hierophanies. As we have seen, Eliade, and others writing in the phenomenological tradition such as Kristensen and van der Leeuw, insisted that all interpretations of religious beliefs and practices must be expressed in terms believers themselves can affirm, or at the very least in language that does not offend religious communities. Segal counters that by subjecting academic interpretations to the believers’ own authority, the scholar of religion not only describes the perspectives of adherents but actually endorses them. In Segal’s words, this position forces phenomenologists of religion to abandon *epoché* by affirming that “the conscious, irreducibly religious meaning for believers is its true one, which means at once its true one for them and its true one in itself.”³³

A similar appraisal of phenomenology has been proposed recently by Paul-François Tremlett, an anthropologist and lecturer in the Open University in the UK. Like Segal, Tremlett's chief offender is Mircea Eliade, whose primary aim in all his academic writings, according to Tremlett, is to restore authentic meaning to a world, which in modernity has deviated from its original, primordial spiritual orientation, defined by Eliade as seeking to be as near the sacred as possible. Tremlett suggests that Eliade's mission is consistent with the phenomenological aim as a whole, which abandons its claim to "value-neutrality by allowing certain assumptions about the reality or truth of the sacred to structure [its] mode of enquiry."³⁴ This is consistent with Segal's charge that the emphasis within the phenomenology of religion on preserving a religious standpoint requires phenomenologists actually to endorse that standpoint. This view is confirmed, according to Tremlett, by Eliade's analysis of sacred space which "founds, establishes and fixes the world, giving it meaning and moral content." He adds: "Modernity is for Eliade a kind of pathological condition marked by alienation, loss, relativism, amnesia and ultimately nihilism."³⁵ This leads to Tremlett's conclusion that the phenomenology of religion is not only value-laden but based on an ideology, the purpose of which "is to make a contribution towards the re-awakening of humanity's essential spirituality in order to re-enchant the world."³⁶

These negative assessments of the anti-reductive stance of phenomenologists, although in many ways compelling, in my view are rendered less persuasive by their oppositional or dichotomous way of thinking. Both Segal and Tremlett insist that the scholar of religion either adopts the perspective of the non-believing social scientist and interprets religion necessarily as an outsider by giving no priority to a believer's own point of view, or the scholar, in the phenomenological tradition, acts like a believer and endorses the religious perspective as an insider. I have argued against this dichotomous view in previous publications by suggesting that the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's analysis of language demonstrated that oppositional thinking does not provide the only, or indeed the best way, for understanding relationships in the world.³⁷ Following Wittgenstein, as he was interpreted by the theologian David Krieger, I contended that just like games we play in everyday life, we can move into and out of various methods in the study of religions without contradiction.³⁸ In order to play a game, one must abide by the regulations of that game, but when one plays a different game, the operable rules vary. We cannot apply the rules of one game to another nor arbitrarily change the rules of a game, but we certainly can understand more than one game at once and know how to play many games well. When this analogy is applied to the study of religions, to argue that a non-believer cannot suspend personal judgments by using alternative methods to enter into the viewpoint of another is like saying we can never learn to play a different game from the one we know best and play regularly.

Certainly, Segal and Tremlett are correct in their judgment that the interpretations of religious communities employed by phenomenologists of religion differ from those employed within specific social scientific disciplines, but this neither invalidates the phenomenological method nor disparages the tools used by the other social sciences. It is like playing more than one game and understanding that different rules apply to each. The aim of the phenomenology of religion is to promote understanding in ways that can be affirmed by believing communities but certainly not in confessional terms which

would be employed by members of those communities as genuine insiders. The interpretations promoted by phenomenologists must speak to the academic community and must be able to withstand rigorous scholarly scrutiny. Where they do not, they require modification or, in some cases, rejection. In this sense, phenomenologists are playing by the same rules as other social scientists. Yet, by limiting their interpretations to theories that encourage understanding of a religious community in terms acceptable within the community, phenomenologists adhere to a self-imposed rule within a discipline devoted exclusively to the study of religion. This method does not dictate to other disciplines in the social sciences what interpretations are permitted or feasible. This is like playing a game that, although related to other games, operates according to its own rules. Only dichotomous thinking prohibits the scholarly community from playing by many rules. In this sense, it is Segal and Tremlett who unduly restrict the freedom of interpretation in a scientific sense by their unwavering commitment to dualistic thinking.

Implications of Phenomenology for the Study of African Religions

If I am correct, the phenomenology of religion remains an important method for studying religions and by extension for studying African Religions. Yet, some points can be made specifically about applying the method in Africa, and thus I return to the two central questions with which I began this article: What, if anything, can the phenomenology of religion contribute to contemporary understandings of African religions? In light of the phenomenological method, as “insiders” do African scholars possess an inherent advantage over non-African scholars of African Religions? I address the first question by exemplifying the value of *epoché* as a technique to limit what I regard as one of the most distorting assumptions made by scholars of African religions, the claim that African indigenous peoples have always and everywhere believed in a Supreme Being. I respond to the second question by subjecting “insider” discourse to a brief analysis in light of “empathetic interpolation.” In the end, I argue that interpretations of the meanings of African religions, the phenomenological eidetic intuition, must be accountable to the data while at the same time avoiding the naïve assumption that the facts present themselves to the observer in a “pure” form.

One of the first critiques leveled by an African at western interpretations of African Indigenous Religions was introduced into scholarly debates some forty years ago by the Ugandan poet, philosopher, and anthropologist, Okot p'Bitek, in his now classic book entitled: *African Religions in Western Scholarship*.³⁹ P'Bitek opened the tenth chapter of his book, which he called “Hellenization of African deities,” with the following words: “When students of African religions describe African deities as eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, etc. they intimate that African deities have identical attributes with those of the Christian God.”⁴⁰ He closes the same chapter with an indictment of such conclusions, which he labels “absurd and misleading,”⁴¹ by referring back to the same attributes: “African peoples”, he writes, “may describe their deities as ‘strong’ but not ‘omnipotent;’ ‘old’ but not ‘eternal;’ ‘great’ not ‘omnipresent.’”⁴² P'Bitek was critical of western missionaries, like Edwin W. Smith, who edited the highly influential book, *African Ideas of God*⁴³ and E.G. Parrinder, whose book *African Traditional Religion* at the

time did perhaps more than any other to interpret African belief systems in simple terms to western audiences.⁴⁴ P'Bitek, however, was most scathing in his appraisal of African Christian apologists, like Parrinder's student, E.B. Idowu, and J.S. Mbiti, whose books written in the 1960s and early 1970s, p'Bitek believed, undermined the pride Africans had in their own religions and cultures by making them acceptable only insofar as they conformed to Christian values.⁴⁵

The writers who were subject to p'Bitek's stinging critique must be seen in part at least as trying to correct prior degrading descriptions of African religions as "fetishistic," "tribalistic", and "primitive." Edwin W. Smith, as a missionary, for theological reasons was concerned to demonstrate that the universal African belief in God testified to the fact that God had been active in Africa before missionaries brought the message of Christ to them.⁴⁶ So, the notion that Africans universally believe in God must be seen in its historical context and for the theological assumptions contained within it. Nonetheless, I would contend that the assumption that Africans have always believed in God is now even more widespread than it was when p'Bitek so damagingly exposed the faults with this idea. Part of this can be explained by the continued popularity of Mbiti's writings, especially in Africa, but other more recent publications have spread the same idea. For example, the African scholar of religions, Jacob Olupona, refers in the introduction to his edited volume, *African Spirituality*, to the wide variations within African myths and the deities they portray, but concludes nevertheless that they all "yield images" of the Supreme Being.⁴⁷ Or, in his article on "Christianity" in John Hinnells' widely read *A New Handbook of Living Religions*, in line with the widespread notion that the Supreme Being throughout Africa was a withdrawn High God, the historian Andrew Walls maintains that "the coming of Christianity was less bringing God to the people than bringing God near."⁴⁸ And, in a book prepared to introduce the study of African Traditional Religions into the secondary school curriculum in Zimbabwe, the editors, Gerrie ter Haar, Ambrose Moyo, and S.J. Nondo assert: "The indigenous religions of Zimbabwe share a common faith in the existence of a Supreme Being who is believed to be the Creator and Sustainer of the universe."⁴⁹ Further, quite recent evidence that academics today are perpetuating the notion that Africans believe universally in a High God is found in two highly acclaimed books written by respected scholars of African history and religions, one co-authored by Jean Allman of the Centre for African Studies in the University of Illinois and John Parker of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, and the other by David Westerlund of Sodertorn University College in Stockholm. I will deal with the Allman and Parker book first.

In their volume entitled *Tongnaab: the History of a West African God*, published in 2005, Allman and Parker describe the primary aim of their study as challenging the widespread notion that African Indigenous Religions only entered history when they encountered Christianity and Islam or when they were affected by the slave trade, colonialism and eventually African nationalism. They observe: "Too often scholars have privileged the processes of conversion to Islam and Christianity as the central historical dynamic of African religion, thereby consigning indigenous belief to the realm of unchanging tradition."⁵⁰ In order to counter this idea, the authors trace the history of Tongnaab, a deity found in northern Ghana in the Tong Hills amongst the Tallensi ethnic group. This emphasis on historical change, of course, makes the question, "Who

is Tongnaab?" extremely difficult to answer, but Allman and Parker contend that local people still believe that Tongnaab "was embedded in the rocky heights of the Tong Hills before the emergence of mankind" and that "Tongnaab—like the ancestors—is generally perceived as a readily accessible refraction of the withdrawn High God, Naawun."⁵¹ I find this conclusion remarkable in light of the overall analysis of the book. The authors appear, perhaps unwittingly, to confirm the widespread notion that the African Supreme Being, after having created the world, withdrew from it. The present deities, including autochthonous beings, are refractions of the Supreme Being. This fits nicely into a Christian interpretation of African Indigenous Religions, whereby God is seen as the source of all things, and is superior to any lesser gods. In the end, the deities that receive the bulk of ritual attention are reduced to acting as mediators between the people and God. That the authors rather uncritically re-enforce this view suggests that, although they have attempted to rescue African Indigenous Religions from a time warp, in the case of the Supreme Being at least, they have fallen into the very trap they have so assiduously sought to avoid.

David Westerlund, even more explicitly than Allman and Parker, presents God as an integral part of African cosmology in his book *African Indigenous Religions and Disease Causation*, published in 2006. Westerlund, who is a highly respected international expert in the history of religions, examines the understanding of disease causation amongst five ethnic groups: the San of south-western Africa, the Maasai of southern Kenya and Northern Tanzania, the Sukuma of north-western Tanzania, the Kongo, the majority of whom today live in the province of Lower Congo in Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Yoruba of Nigeria. In his study, Westerlund discusses what he calls beliefs in "supra-human" beings in each of these groups and seems unconcerned about employing the word God as part of his descriptions about such beings.⁵² Amongst the San, he discusses "heavenly beings" and describes God as creator, suggesting that various names used to designate the Supreme Being normally are associated with the sky.⁵³ He follows this with a chapter on "God in Maasai thought", and, although he qualifies belief in the Supreme Being by admitting that not all Maasai believe in God, he argues nonetheless that "God is associated particularly with the heavenly realm, yet he is not identified with it. He may also be said to be omnipresent."⁵⁴ The Sukumu, who are a Bantu speaking people, place a heavy emphasis on ancestors, but Westerlund adds, "When people invoke ancestors, they often invoke God as well."⁵⁵ Amongst the Kongo people, Westerlund notes that the name of the Supreme Being or God the creator is Nzambi. "It signifies someone who is higher, stronger, more powerful than other beings; it also denotes something incomprehensible and mysterious, or, in short, divine."⁵⁶ And, of course, following the many studies on the Yoruba, Westerlund observes that the most important names for God are Olodumare and Olorun, which point to the Yoruba belief that God is Creator, "the Supreme Being who is immortal and unchanging."⁵⁷ It is important to note that Westerlund is fully aware that Christian and Islamic influences have elevated the notion of God above that which may have existed several hundred years ago. Yet, the fact that, in each case, he draws attention to the local word for God or the Supreme Being, seems to assume that every African people has some idea of a Supreme Being or God and which generally can be translated into terms commensurate with Christian (or Islamic) notions of a Creator.

In each of these cases, I am arguing that what began as a theological idea in the writings of Smith, Parrinder, Idowu, and Mbiti has now become uncritically accepted and incorporated into works that are not written for theological purposes. It is at this point that the use of the phenomenological *epoché* becomes most relevant. By employing the technique of *epoché*, a scholar is able to suspend such judgments or at least develop a healthy suspicion towards them. Part of the analysis which follows, of course, will necessarily need to frame the question concerning the African belief in God historically, since to study African Indigenous Religions today cannot avoid taking into account the long contact such religions have had with Christianity and Islam and at the same time take cognizance of the impact of Western educational, political, and economic influences. Since African societies were oral, tracing a universal belief in a Supreme Being historically is problematic, but insight from linguistics, archaeology and early accounts of contact with African societies written by explorers, ethnographers, and missionaries can provide some tools for drawing conclusions. The important point is that the phenomenology of religion calls on the researcher to challenge uncritical assumptions, just as Husserl challenged the “natural attitude.” In this way, on many topics related to the study of African Indigenous Religions, but particularly on the largely unexamined notion of the ubiquitous belief in God, the scholar seeks to limit potentially distorting biases and base conclusions on the data, which then can confirm the original theory, modify it, or lead to entirely new interpretations.

The second important contribution the phenomenology of religion can make applies much more generally to the “insider/outsider” discourse in the study of African religions. The African scholar, as an “insider,” according to a phenomenological analysis, has no inherent advantage over non-African “outside” researchers. This is because the method of empathetic interpolation emphasizes that humans all think alike, and that it is possible to gain an understanding of cultures other than one’s own, if a proper attitude based on *epoché* is employed and if the time and skills for attaining understanding are cultivated. From a phenomenological perspective, the interpretation that scholars, African or not, give to the data never simply replicates the language of believers nor even necessarily uses concepts derived from their cultural settings. This is evident in the terminology employed by phenomenologists, such as Eliade’s concept hierophany. Believers would not use such technical language to describe the way the sacred is known in their traditions, but if the meaning of the term was understood by them, it certainly would not be offensive. This suggests that the scholar of religion, by using empathy, whilst interpolating what is unfamiliar in terms of one’s own cultural and social background, can enter into any cultural setting and provide a sound academic interpretation of what might at first sight appear incomprehensible, strange, or bizarre. This process is intended, as van der Leeuw argued, to overcome the division between the subject and the object in the study of any religion. It does not, however, guarantee that the interpretation provided by the scholar is accurate; it simply affirms that accurate interpretations are open to all scholars regardless of their social or cultural backgrounds.

On this point, it is important to emphasize that the eidetic intuition proposed by any scholar must remain accountable to the phenomena themselves. If the interpretative structure of meaning is incapable of being tested in the data, it must be rejected. Eliade provides a case in point. As we have seen, some of Eliade’s fiercest critics have accused

him of basing his conclusions on a personal pre-commitment to the value of a religious view of life. Thus, even if Eliade's interpretations of religion proved inoffensive to believers and demonstrated an acute sympathy towards religious communities, that would not ensure that his interpretation of the essence of religion is correct. In fact, in his discussion of Eliade's interpretations of Australian Aboriginal Religions, Tony Swain argues that Eliade's emphasis on the sky as a symbol of transcendence is not confirmed by the data.⁵⁸ The point stressed by the phenomenology of religion on this question thus is two-pronged: following the method of empathetic interpolation, the meanings scholars assign to the data must in theory be capable of being affirmed by "insiders" within the religious communities under study and such interpretations must be capable of being tested by recourse to the phenomena on which the eidetic intuition is based.

Conclusions

My review of the continued relevance of the phenomenology of religion for the study of African Indigenous Religions, and more broadly, for all religions in Africa, is critically important for two reasons. One has to do with academic integrity, and the other touches on ethics in academic research. I have made the first point repeatedly throughout this article when I have contended that a defining task of scholarly research is to question and, where appropriate, to challenge, widely accepted assumptions by showing the underlying presuppositions that inform them. On the second point, the phenomenology of religion insists that African Indigenous Religions in their many forms should be studied in their own right, and not as a preparation for Christianity or as a base on which all religious beliefs are constructed. If we accord other religious traditions the dignity of studying their histories, oral or written traditions, rituals and beliefs in their own right and not as a subset of another tradition, then it appears, on grounds of academic fairness alone, that we ought to do the same with traditions whose records are largely oral and presentational, sometimes small scale and largely kinship orientated. This is precisely what Okot p'Bitek intended, when near the end of his book he concluded: "The aim of the study of African religions should be to understand the religious beliefs and practices of African peoples, rather than to discover the Christian God in Africa."⁵⁹ I regard this as thoroughly consistent with phenomenological principles and why I contend that the phenomenological method continues to make a constructive contribution to the academic study of religions in Africa.

Notes

- 1 For my complete discussion of the phenomenological method and its critics, see James L. Cox, *An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 48–72; 151–64.
- 2 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas. General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, translated by W.R.B. Gibson (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1931), 111.
- 3 Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology*, translated by J.E. Turner (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1938), 646.
- 4 Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, 675.

- 5 W. Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion*, translated by John Carman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960).
- 6 Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Duckworth, 1986), 228.
- 7 Kristensen, *Meaning of Religion*, 13.
- 8 Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, 675.
- 9 Ninian Smart, *The Phenomenon of Religion* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 54.
- 10 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Faith of Other Men* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1972).
- 11 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Patterns of Faith around the World* (Oxford and Boston: Oneworld Publications, 1998).
- 12 W.C. Smith, 1998, 35–48.
- 13 W.C. Smith, 1998, 37–8.
- 14 W.C. Smith, *Patterns of Faith*, 49–62.
- 15 W.C. Smith, *Patterns of Faith*, 77–90.
- 16 W.C. Smith, *Patterns of Faith*, 63–76.
- 17 Ninian Smart, "Scientific Phenomenology and Wilfred Cantwell Smith's Misgivings," in *The World's Religious Traditions: Current Perspectives in Religious Studies*, ed. Frank Whaling (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1984), 264.
- 18 Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, translated by D. Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969 [1929]), 246.
- 19 James L. Cox, *A Guide to the Phenomenology of Religion: Key Figures, Formative Influences and Subsequent Debates* (London: T. and T. Clark, 2006), 183–7.
- 20 Mircea Eliade, *The Quest. History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 36.
- 21 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*, translated by Willard R. Trask (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt, 1987 [1959]), 9–13.
- 22 Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996 [1958]), 29.
- 23 Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 20–4.
- 24 Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 29–32.
- 25 Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 63–4. See also, Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975), 5–12.
- 26 Gavin Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology. Rethinking the Study of Religion* (London and New York: Cassell, 1999), 108.
- 27 Tony Swain, *On "Understanding" Australian Aboriginal Religion* (Bedford Park, South Australia: Australian Association for the Study of Religions for the Charles Strong Memorial Trust, 1985), 8.
- 28 Richard H. Popkin and Avrum Stroll, *Philosophy. Made Simple*, 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1986), 146.
- 29 Mircea Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 43.
- 30 Mircea Eliade, *Australian Religions. An Introduction* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1973), 196.
- 31 Mircea Eliade, *Australian Religions*, 197. See also, W.E.H. Stanner, *The Dreaming and Other Essays* (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2009).
- 32 Robert Segal, "In Defense of Reductionism," in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*, ed. R. McCutcheon (London and New York: Cassell, 1999), 139–63.
- 33 Segal, "In Defense of Reductionism," 143.
- 34 Paul-François Tremlett, *Religion and the Discourse on Modernity* (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 30.

- 35 Tremlett, *Religion and the Discourse on Modernity*, 47.
- 36 Tremlett, *Religion and the Discourse on Modernity*, 47.
- 37 James L. Cox, "Not a New Bible but a New Hermeneutics: An Approach from within the Science of Religion," in *"Re-writing" the Bible: the Real Issues*, eds. I. Mukonyora, J.L. Cox and F.J. Verstraelen (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1993), 103–23; James L. Cox, "Methodological Considerations Relevant to Understanding African Indigenous Religions," in *The Study of Religions in Africa: Past, Present and Prospects*, eds. J. Platvoet, J. Cox and J. Olupona (Cambridge: Roots and Branches, 1996), 162–70; James L. Cox, *Rational Ancestors: Scientific Rationality and African Indigenous Religions* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998), 94–7.
- 38 David J. Krieger, *The New Universalism: Foundations for a Global Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books), 110–18.
- 39 Okot P'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1970). Reprinted as *African Religions in European Scholarship* (New York: ECA Associates, 1990).
- 40 P'Bitek, *African Religions in European Scholarship*, 80.
- 41 P'Bitek, *African Religions in European Scholarship*, 80.
- 42 P'Bitek, *African Religions in European Scholarship*, 88.
- 43 Edwin W. Smith, *African Ideas of God: A Symposium* (London: Edinburgh House Press).
- 44 Geoffrey Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1954).
- 45 E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare. God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longmans, 1962); John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969); John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: S.P.C.K., 1970).
- 46 Edwin W. Smith, "Introduction," in *African Ideas of God: A Symposium*, ed. Edwin W. Smith, 34. Smith writes: "When the Christian missionary comes with the Good News of God revealed in Jesus Christ as loving Father—whatever else in his teaching they find it hard to accept, this [belief in God] at least they readily take to their hearts."
- 47 Jacob K. Olupona, "Introduction," in *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York: Crossroad, 2000), xvi.
- 48 Andrew Walls, "Christianity," in *A New Handbook of Living Religions*, ed. John R. Hinnells (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 147.
- 49 Gerrie ter Haar, Ambrose Moyo and S. J. Nondo, *African Traditional Religions in Religious Education. A Resource Book with Special Reference to Zimbabwe* (Utrecht: Utrecht University, 1992), 7.
- 50 Jean Allman and John Parker, *Tongnaab. The History of a West African God* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 6.
- 51 Allman and Parker, *Tongnaab*, 44.
- 52 David Westerlund, *African Indigenous Religions and Disease Causation. From Spiritual Beings to Living Humans* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), 6.
- 53 Westerlund, *African Indigenous Religions and Disease Causation*, 43–4.
- 54 Westerlund, *African Indigenous Religions and Disease Causation*, 67–8.
- 55 Westerlund, *African Indigenous Religions and Disease Causation*, 89.
- 56 Westerlund, *African Indigenous Religions and Disease Causation*, 118.
- 57 Westerlund, *African Indigenous Religions and Disease Causation*, 124.
- 58 Swain, *On "Understanding" Australian Aboriginal Religion*, 7–8.
- 59 P'Bitek, *African Religions in European Scholarship*, 111.

CHAPTER 2

Philosophy of Religion on African Ways of Believing¹

V.Y. Mudimbe and Susan Mbula Kilonzo

Introduction

This contribution on religions in Africa addresses discourses on events described by Emile Durkheim as “*faits sociaux*.” To proceed with this reflection and analysis we offer some precautions. First, conceptual discourses on rites, and their relation to concrete orders of belief, reflect views of the world and interpretive processes informed by anthropological and religious studies. Second, we privilege the post-1960s period to acknowledge African initiatives that affirm their responsibility. On rites themselves, deciphering narratives of this period means navigating through networks in which the reality of *la chose du texte* refers to lines that incessantly emulate and translate cultural difference. Third, no exacting journeys through African spaces can ignore Christian and Islamic hegemonic practices, which forced their witnesses, the letter, and the will to convert Africans. Against the apparent fragility of oral traditions, Islam and Christianity, both religions of the letter par excellence, have affected almost all social structures. Fourth, the very word religion, which, when interrogated, might not inflect the characteristics of its cultural authority, is examined according to its own history. Fifth, in our philosophical reflections we read rites as texts and consider any religious practice in its double value as being simultaneously a negation of something and an affirmation of something in a particular situation.

We explore fragments of discourses on rites and social facts in ways of believing. We interrogate them through narrative values, in relation to Christianity and Islam. We link them to the anecdote on the symbolic passing of traditional priests, and their new authority versus the authority of John S. Mbiti’s now classic *African Religions and Philosophy* (1975). These approaches affirm a spiritual world and a religious universe where nature and its object give witness to a divine presence. We situate and problematize rites as social facts within a growing literature and histories, to interrelate three

forms of mediations: a witness, the letter and the aim of their discourses and pronouncements. We examine testimonies on belief, the word or letter, and the will to truth that explains statistical conversions, noting that the dynamics of conversions has served as key to understanding incorporation into new faiths in African religious studies. Three historical waves initiated three different Christianities: first, the conversion of North East Africa from the apostolic era and since the sixth century and their relation to Islam. The second wave, which began in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, parallels European imperialism; and finally, the nineteenth century, the period of conquering colonial Christianity. Adjectives used commonly, like apostolic, imperial, and colonial, depict ways of figuring the epochs of religious growth. As Roland Olivier writes (Harper Collins, 1992), "most African societies first received the gospel from fellow Africans. The main contribution of missionaries was in building the Church" (1992:206). Unexpectedly, such an entry serves well as an explanation of the conversion induced by missions.

Three crucial mediations define colonial and imperial missions. First, the catechist stands as an institution between two cultures, translates, reconstructs, and locally propagates the language of the mission. Second, the letter of the message is socialized through the metamorphosis of loci, in clear formulas, and the catechist ritualizes the letter in a new language to tell the dogmatic story of the truth. Finally, the objective project is to transform an original place into a new Christian space through operations that include constructing a church and its appendages to structure the economy of the habitat, leading to the recession of an alterity. These three mediations also express the expansion of Islam. First, the historical waves and the sign of religious expressions situate conflicting epiphanies. Second, the idea of African religions refers to social institutions authenticated in their own history and their contemporary will to alterity signified in processes of re-traditionalizing their own systems. Third, the idea of an African Christianity, or African Islam, refers to religious and social institutions and the varieties they have induced through the proclamations of their precepts; although their growth has not obliterated African religions.

Africanization is a post-colonial phenomenon concerned with adapting modalities of beliefs and a rethinking of rituals. Christian independency challenges colonial representation of ways of believing. Fundamentalist assemblies claim a more authentic resumption of the Gospel, and mainstream Christianity continues to pursue inculturation. These moves seek to reformulate the conversion movement and we can use Jean Wahl's expression to describe the new concerns as "modality judgments in a [space] struggle," articulating religious experience in time, social context, culture and traditions, often involving what Jean Wahl describes both as "state of trans-descendence" and a "state of trans-ascendence" in relation to "an inapprehensible Other." This essay opts for a position on the religious; approaching the expression "African religion" with prudence (Arvind Sharma, 2006). Besides Mbiti's scholarship, René Luneau (2001), René Luneau and Louis-Vincent Thomas (1977, 1980,) and studies from the Kinshasa-based Centre d'études des religions africaines (CERA, 1979) all share common characteristics: they acknowledge a critical mode in conceptualizing interactions between the sacred and the profane, and what the notion of local mediations entail in terms of cultural demands.

One

We begin with the category of religion itself. Peter Rigby (1985, 1992) wrestles with how to integrate the efficacy of a Marxist analysis and everyday grids in Maasai assuming the sacred and the profane, thus the religious. In chapter 4 of his 1992 book titled *Ideology, Religion, and Capitalist Penetration* Rigby argues: "I base my argument in this chapter about Illparakuwo and Maasai ideology, if you will, the religion (although needs for this concept as a distinct entry becomes increasingly slight) upon the assumption that there can be no general theory of ideology (and hence, no general theory of religion), but only a general theory of the condition for the production of particular ideologies, in specific social formations with particular modes of production" (1992:59). Rigby identifies three ideas: first, he analyzes the effect of the colonial administration policy in East Africa in post-independent Kenya. Second, a major point, the symbolics of age-sets represented in the *eunoto* ritual of passage from junior to senior warriors, an important element in the singularity of social formation, whose meaning could be lost if Rigby moves uncritically and situates it within an "ideology and practice," argument for the immediately visible order of the profane. Third, the complexity lies in the religious dimension at the heart of the construction, which is signified in references to prophets (*iloibonok kituaak*).

External belief systems, Islam and Christianity, have affected ritual function negatively. Indeed, a methodological constraint has blurred the inner reality of the *eunoto*, and its connection to the value of the *murrano* (warrior-hood), and that "resist penetration." Critical of the procedures, Rigby raises one major question of method about symbolic expressions and the language that would explicate it. Rigby's text might imply that most people would feel more comfortable using the adjective "religious" than the substantive "religion." John Dewey (1934) elaborated on the tension between "religion" versus "religious." In everyday language, the polysemy of the term "religious" seems obvious, and one could safely argue that, being a metaphor, the "religious" doesn't necessarily pertain to "religion." If speaking of African religious practice doesn't raise eyebrows, African religion still does, at least in some sections of philosophy of religion.

In our approach, geographic spaces reflect the experiential place of communities, cultural diversity with visible features that would justify both coherence in description and explicate why they can be linked within a panorama of rituals, deities, and seasons of life. This is an argument that stands as a rhetorical manner for explaining an observation and a reading of notions such as African religion and African cultures. Each demands a problematization. The adjective "African" designates a continental geography, and the ethnic diversity of the population that indicates a high genetic complexity. One then could argue that a functional hypothesis could organize validly a map of empirical systems of initiation from correlations between historical migrations, languages, and colonial policies of inventing "tribes" and managing ethnic relocations. The return of African religion in the postcolonial context mirrors the need of believers who, out of an intellectual obligation, accept the summoning of their own heritage, which has necessitated the creation of group-sanctioned symbols.

Metaphors translate new assumptions in religious studies, refine practices, and redesign questions of method. Ninian Smart (1983) presents a pluralistic view of metaphors approached from various dimensions (mythic, doctrinal, ethical, social) that end with questions on the future of religion and ideology. "Symbols help to bring us to an understanding of the rituals of the social context in which we find ourselves: the old body of lore which centers around the meal for instance, thinking about the rituals attached to eating will help us understand a communion, fasting, and other sacred approaches to food and drink" (1983:177). It does not seem, however, certain that all churches would agree: "it is wise [. . .] always to see religion in its interplay with changes now going on in our world" (1983:178). Would recourse to a classical manner meet at least basic expectations? Think of Bernardo Bernadi's *Africa tradizione et moderna* (Bernadi, 1998), who records the African crisis in modernity from a multiplicity of sources including the Biblical, the slave-trade, their social models, and situates them against cosmological systems and their implications in today's world, particularly with regard to the tension between Westernization and Africanization. Roger Bastide wrote, "books on African religion are basically an immense gallery of mirrors that reflect to the West its image of itself, desires, dreams, passions. Could we ever succeed in breaking these deforming mirrors?" (1998:271).

Against the approach of Mbiti and his generation, the collective interrogation of the CERA, and non Abrahamic religions, Arvind Sharma's *A Primal Perspective on the Philosophy of Religion* illustrates a malaise in the patience with which he struggles in order to make a case about the obvious, namely which branch could be comprised under the formula of a philosophical perspective. To explain what the notion designates, one should address it from the anthropological and the historical discourses on the religious. Felix M. Keesing (1958) and Arnold Toynbee (1956) offer insights to the question.

Keesing argues that religion has two main functions: *explanatory*, insofar as it responds to "why questions;" and its *validating capacity*, in relation to what structures the society. A paragraph on the contribution of the anthropologist Firth adds the *symbolic* dimension of religion. Arnold Toynbee differentiates religions through "the epiphany of the higher religions" (1956:78–91), attested in four models: the Buddhist Mahāyāna and Christianity, of the first two centuries of our era; Judaism and Zoroastrianism, a few centuries before. By "epiphany of higher religions," Toynbee admires a conversion that implies two main features: one, an attitude "of accepting suffering for oneself and trying to turn one's own suffering to positive account by acting, at the cost of suffering, of one's feelings of Pity and Love, for one's fellow creatures" (1956:78); two: "encounters between human beings and the Absolute Reality that is in, and at the same time beyond all the phenomena of existence, life, and history; and any soul might meet God at any time and place in any historical circumstances."

Functionalist anthropological approach has become part of a popular understanding of the concept in today's pluralist perspective. Until recently, the historian's reigning assumption would have, at best, considered the excellent monographs of Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton (1996) or Wyatt MacGaffey (1986), mainly in an auxiliary capacity, however, *The Bible in Africa* (Dube and West, 2000), edited by Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, is a collection that attends to a new panorama and unveils the "mentality" of a new spiritual landscape of interdenominational Christianity. It uses hermeneutical, and historical perspectives that address a "redrawing of the boundaries of the Bible in Africa"

structuring values in novel readings of Judeo-Christian traditions. Unapologetically, spiritual arguments assume a “will to alterity” along with a “will to truth” in facing the biblical experience. The editors point out that they did not present a specific agenda to the contributors but allowed their essays to set the perspective on the Bible in Africa and they offered “a partial picture [of] the presence of the Bible in Africa” (2000: I).

The text engages an identity, Christian and African, similar in style to T. Maliqalim and Abdou’s *In Whose Image? Political Islam and Urban Practices in Sudan* (1994). The question argues that speaking or writing as a Muslim precludes opting for a separation of identities. Can one “speak sometimes as a Muslim and other times as a social psychologist” (1994:24). In *The Bible in Africa*, one senses the fragility of distinctions between philosophy of religion and philosophical theology, two languages within, and about the culture that explains them. On Christian and African identity, twenty years before *The Bible in Africa*, “The Panafrican Meeting of Third-World Theologians” took place in Accra, Ghana, November 17–24, 1977 (M. McVeigh, 1980:156). Mc Veigh indicated that the declaration of that interdenominational meeting on theology (a) noted that earlier theological approaches to traditional religions were a preparation for the Gospel; (b) favored a philosophical theology attentive to African realities, committed to dialogue with non African religions and based on the encounter with the Bible; (c) acknowledged a theology of liberation inspired by the South African and African-American experience which recognized (1) that the Bible and the Christian heritage as the history of the Church “since the time of our Lord;” (2) an African anthropology that accepts the primacy of life over death: an optimist view of life connections; (3) African traditional religions as reflecting ways in which the “God of history speaks to all.” The Accra meeting had been preceded in Abidjan, September 12–17, 1977, by an ecumenical colloquium organized by *Présence Africaine* on Black civilization and Catholicism. The proceedings recognized the particularity of cultural contexts in theology and a realist approach which would include a pedagogical and pastoral understanding of theology, as in Engelbert Mveng’s positions on recent trends, published in *Bulletin of African Theology*, 5, 9 (1983).

The Bible in Africa situates itself within a new discursive configuration. On the religious, initiatives have been promoting “stewardships” in transcultural horizons. A challenge materialized itself with the 1984 Yaoundé Meeting of the Ecumenical Association of African Theologians that debated on the very letter of *The Mission of the Church Today* (Saint Paul, s.d.). In addition to a discussion of the future of missions, and its African commitment, three areas of interest are circumscribed: (a) culture and dialogue of religions; (b) African theology and the Church universal mission; (c) the woman and the Church mission. A record, notes Fabien Eboussi Boulaga in *Contre-temps. L’enjeu de Dieu en Afrique* (1991), having met Christianity in its historical and social grandeur, what is being interrogated is not its essence, but the good usage of relations it opens up, he argues.

Two

A philosophical reflection on the religious experience recognizes that life and existence are ritualized in most religious experiences. Talal Asad (1993) says: “ritual is therefore

directed at the apt performance of what is prescribed, something that depends on intellectual and practical disciplines but does not itself require decoding. In other words, apt performance involves not symbols to be interpreted but abilities to be acquired according to rules that are sanctioned by those in authority: it presupposes no obscure meanings, but rather the formation of physical and linguistic skills." Rites as apt performances presuppose codes—in the regulative as opposed to the semantic sense—and people who evaluate and teach them (1993:62).

Initiation generally designates a variety of institutions, spaces of discontinuities and interactions, transitions and recommencements. A major entry to explication of religious practices, it has no adequate name and its activity escapes the logic of definitive classifications. One should take care regarding the value of concepts needed in relation to social science to designate symbolic layers that initiations activate between the visible and the invisible, the immanent and the transcendent, and apropos ways of perceiving such cultural economies from a rationalist angle. At the outset of *Philosophie d'Afrique noire* (1995), Henri Maurier used the expression *l'insinuation raciste*. The rationalist can find good reasons to take for granted whatever grid can be bestowed on such a difference. On the other hand, the same presuppositions could justify as an essence the very thing imprisoning the difference in a fictitious web of symbols.

Initiation ritual is mediated by constraining the means that shape a vision. In its contemporary experience, it often transfers lessons from success stories of Christian and Islamic conversions and adapts an empirical knowledge in inculturating its precepts. The ritual holds, in this sense, an ontological guiding principle, and spiritually, it presupposes communal authority. Some rituals, birth or naming for example, embedded in an Islamic or in a Christian-modeled structure, test the reality of two fused religious ethnicities. A new frame rehabilitates an older ruling form within a cultured coherence of Christianity or Islam. Less constrained are Christian sects who observably tend to be faithful to a few chosen procedures from the past, and they maximize transformative imports of modernity.

Initiation as a preeminent religious act uses symbols to mark discontinuity and a passage in the life of people in their communities. A symbol in its own right, initiation articulates a narrative transcribing a moment in someone's life. Its formation can be decoded from a multiplicity of axes. As processes with presuppositions, stressed or not, initiations are open-ended and refer to biological modalities of cultural integration, maintaining its configuration by acting upon the initiate's mind and body in order to accord the individual to the specific culture's framework of a vision, its landscapes, and interacting forces. Taking place in an isolated place, initiation signifies a death and ensures a birth to the future. In such a secluded locality initiation reformulates an imaginary space; a "now" recollects itself in a "before" and brings about an adult personality.

Commentaries often use the word metamorphosis for the initiation rituals, and rightly so because an initiation synchronizes a number of identical celebrations. Throughout life, metaphors and metonyms of death and rebirth duplicate rituals, healing, and purification, receiving a new name, or acknowledging status. These roles re-actualize in repeated explanations the coherence of a group as it enacts the genesis of its history. The conceptual unit, "before-present-future," parallels what it designates empirically, "childhood, transformation, adulthood." It denotes, symbolically, relations

to expandable conceptual codes of “veiled eyes-unveiling-illumination.” An adult who watches a mask at an event, could read subtle values organizing his perception of things, that of his generation in the ritual. Fibers on a mask may constitute an opening and could point to vegetables and nature; a season in human life and its products, the food or the clothes it procures. From the colors of the same fibers on the mask, one may point to other sorts of conveniences between things and beings, the earth and human habitat, death and life. Initiation opens a cosmic order in the consciousness of the adult who can connect the seen to the symbolized and to a knowledge of the world.

Three

Names are important in Africa because they circulate vertically and horizontally, expressing relations, language acts of dependence, and values that go back to an absolute originary source. Any name passes for a word-memory on cultural topics and events of a community or a family, its past and its future. An active verb namely recites a being, qualifies individuality, and inscribes plural destinies. In West Kenya, some ethnic groups have a trans-generational model that structures triadic privileged relations between grandparents, the subject’s ego, and children. As the dyadic type, they all confirm affiliations and ascertain with names, forms of piety, as well as social obligations. Naming integrates social domains and their memories, marks a life, and links the young person to a past and future and brings a life force, from an ancestor or elder, an event, or a circumstance. Names are a dedication and a habitat binding generations. A name is sacred, reflects a cosmic order, and figures the memory of an ethnicity.

In today’s trans-cultural space this concept brings to light a major issue of Christianity addressed by René Luneau (2001) in *Chemins de la christologie africaine* (Desclée) concerning the very meaning of an insertion in the Christian tradition. In reference to Matthew 16:15: “he said unto them, but who do you say I am? It is possible to expound on Christian naming as an act of symbolic belonging. By affirming that he was born within Catholicism, the Cameroonian philosopher Fabien Eboussi Boulaga is stating a way of being within an existential structure of believing that justifies his interrogations of *Christianity without Fetishes* (1984). An act of faith given to itself in a name reflects the visage of a history, the sign of a spiritual election. René Luneau adds: “in Africa too, one is Christian, one is born Christian, from a generation to the following. Therefore, in which way to ask: and you, what do you say about Jesus Christ?” Analysts are right in observing with insistence that, by way of names, Christianity assumes the memory of people, staging a vision. In naming, a claim is chronicled, linking the believer, the child to the fatherhood of a revelation and the symbols of its imaginary.

In his study of religious re-appropriation, the Congolese clergyman, Lambert Museka Ntumba, stresses an African nomination of the divine (FCK, 2001). He begins with the very sign of one who cannot be named, God, since “He has already given to himself all possible names” (2001:84–5). The predicates of God’s name situate divinity within a culture as a transcendent elder, the Lord of the present, and a generous giver as one, who transcends other earthly leaders, has authority, gives wise council, loves, and is merciful to all life forms. Among the Mongos, Gustaf Hulstaert writes, divine names

are predicated, (CERA, 1979:2), on values given to God as unique creator, elder of ancestors, and supreme divinity. On the East coast, Charles Nyamiti calls "*Christ as Our Ancestor*" (Mambo Press, Zimbabwe, 1984; Bénézet Bujo, 1986). The Nkundo recognize absolute lordship referring to as the Master of days, of the sun; the *Isaka*, the Mysterious one, the absolute owner who is acknowledged in good peaceful passing away. God is the one who is *Ōyalí*; and who comes first, and has absolute power: the lawmaker, judge, providence.

The bodies of these nominations have been converted within Christian grids. Several processes are involved: an observation translates a faith, coheres acts of nomination and acts of believing in a transcultural code of speaking about the divine. Tillich (1955: 3, 38) also argues that the name narrates a relation that recounts the saga of a memory. Names and the things they symbolize are assumed in relations to beings and to things; the past and the future are summoned in religious practices within the dynamics of vital forces that affirm divinity into existence.

Invoking Tillich tests a conceptual grid against another one, assuming that both can interact in a symbolic field. On the one side of theory, there is the space of Christian imperatives and an inculturating process and African Christian thinkers see no need to prove the inculturating reason as an index to Christianity. In Tillich's correlation technique, one interprets an act in naming and the name itself attests a symbolic translatability although one faces the challenge of reconciling the paradox of African names as Christian narratives. In his text, Tillich opposes the sign to the symbol, considering the first as referring to both the natural and the social. Then he suggests four main considerations before qualifying the religious as it stands under the law of ambiguity, "meaning that it is creative and destructive at the same time." The theoretical background that supports the statement distinguishes between the profane and the sacred, and itself doubles in a methodic tension between the empirical and the transcendent exemplified by the symbol. Against the notion of sign, the symbol, insists Tillich, presents a number of characteristics which include: "the non-participation 'pointed to' the reality," which is attested in connotations, its being "representative" and mirroring something else. It has the capacity of "opening up levels of reality." For Tillich, the symbol is ruled from a number of levels; first, an immanent one structuring forces within a context; and a transcendent one, having God as the symbol, the ultimate non-symbolic representation. In addition, follows the level actualized by God's attributes and acts that the believer acknowledges as being proper.

Does the approach absorb what can be said in general about African traditional religious symbols, and African names for instance, as Christian symbols? For sure, conversion assigns them an already given of meaning that is a step in what can be engaged from it. The question concerns the basic distinction between the sign and the symbol. One could test at least three issues. First, the adjective "African," highlights Africans and their cultural impulses of the continent, irreducible to a unique womb. Second, there is a question of coherence in using anthropological references about the name and separate articulations, opposing types of generational alignment to procedures in naming. The problem cannot be separated from the requirement of the empirical "concerning the correspondence of concepts." For instance, God as "a ground of being," is a religious question that Tillich deals with from a position attentive to the

fact that the logos which became flesh is not the Greek logos, something acknowledged by African theorists. Yet, does it test the symbols that the name connotes in everyday expressions against those that reference God conceived as the one who sent his son to Earth?

Conversions re-historicize God's names in religious ethnicities informed by integrative processes of the globalizing effects of Christianity and Islam. In East Africa, the Swahili concept for God, *Mungu*, still in use, preexisted the missionary activity of the nineteenth century. After almost a century of using it, the Catholic Church in Rwanda went back to the local name of the divinity, *Imana*. In Congo where Lingala is spoken, one finds different designations of God in the same language such as (a) *Nzambe*, (b) *Nyamolo*, (c) *Nzakomba*, (d) *Mawu*, (e) *Yaweh*. Such diversity, including the Hebraic name, raises questions on what each designation means and shows that God's symbols vary, depending on actors. Naming the divine and naming humans, interrelated processes have their foundation in initiations.

As a discourse ordering individualities, initiation carries souls and bodies into ways of naturalizing and moderating tensions. A masculine grid moderates the imaginary of evil, opposite, and purity. A reference should be made to the notions of sorcery and witchcraft that directly or indirectly, are linked to organization of power, and determined by initiation procedures that transcend the seasons of life. The discourse explaining and judging it, as well as that of its actual experience and practice, engages the everyday life of beings and that of spirits. In this capacity, it structures social morality; and, as Ciekawy writes, "works to frame an ethics for our catastrophic times" (1988:183). The practice can be compared to other studies on Sudan, Rwanda, Zambia, and the Congo. Geschiere's bibliography remains exemplary of the situation in postcolonial re-evaluations. The map of statecraft and witchcraft denounces each, brings them together, "in a dialectical relation . . . witchcraft technologies can blend with other moral crusades that produce varieties of witch-others" (1998:134), fervently multiplying rites of healing and purification.

Finally, Sister Bwanga Zinga interprets initiation as an African mystical marriage by stressing its strong knot, "a blood pact" or an alliance with God, as a rite exemplifying the inculturation project (n.d.). Sr. Bwanga Zinga explains the blood pact and justifies the rite of one's consecration in religious life, to which members of the African Congregation of St. Thérèse of Lisieux submit. This interdisciplinary perspective draws from anthropologists, specifically from Evans-Pritchard's Azande pact, H. Tegnæus and L. de Sousberghe's union to death; secondly, refers to the motivations, implications, and consequences of such public engagements. Thirdly, it recognizes the Christian concept of a mystical union with God because "the blood pact can constitute a real deep engagement for an African nun and her alliance with God and fraternity with fellow humans" (1981:190).

Four

From Durkheim's lesson, discourses on concepts about rites relate to concrete orders of believing that reflect a view of the world. Our interpretive descriptions and articulations are informed by a variety of anthropological and religious studies. Our

second precaution concerns the history of the discourse on African religion. From the way it is reflected in orientations that mark African responsibility in religious discourse today, this is illustrated by the series of books published by Orbis, and the trend which is represented with Kwame Bediako's *Christianity in Africa* (1995), the Pauline publications in Nairobi and elsewhere, as well as the ambitious *Théologie africaine au 21^e siècle* (2002) by Benézet Bujo and Juvenal Ilunga Muya. On the letter and the witness, we have both a discontinuity and a problematization of Christian evangelization resulting from a critique of disciplinary practices, remarkably in the dramatization of the role of the researcher that led to a local and progressive reevaluation of both the translation of the letter and the conceptualization of conversion. On initiation knowledge for example, the saturation of interrogations took place in both religious and philosophical questions.

Two angles could be used to synthesize currents and trends of discourses. On the one hand, one would look at the historical development of the approach to the letter as a way of representing the witness in three moments. The first is represented by scholars like K.A. Dickson and E.B. Idowu in West Africa, Alexis Kagame and Vincent Mulago in Central Africa, and Mbiti in East Africa. These perspectives were modified in the 1970s by some ideas that conveyed ways of adapting Christian fundamentals. Three trends are recognizable: the first, and the most accented, the Centre de Théologie Africaine of Vincent Mulago, the problematization of the theological discourse as formulated by C. Nyamiti for new theological approaches and vision, and the intervention of Mercy A. Oduyoye who initiated new questions about the experience of a female theologian. The rationale of this incarnation approach led to the inculturation of theology; signified in the statement of the colloquium of Cotonou (Benin) on "Religion africaine comme source des valeurs de culture et de civilisation," organized by Alioune Diop's African Society of Culture and published by Présence Africaine in 1972. The best sign without contest remains *The Bible in Africa*, edited by Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube in 2001.

Historically, clearer distinctions of disciplinary approaches, which paradoxically implied their necessary interconnections, have emerged in three areas. First, the historical approach to African Christianity articulated by scholars like Adrian Hastings, Paul Gifford, and Bujo's promising historical and theological study of the African religious. Second, social scientific approaches span several decades including scholars like E. Evans-Pritchard, Wyatt MacGaffey, J.D.Y. Peel. The tradition of functionalism has maintained its basic principles and integrated lessons from structuralism. Finally, theological trends have shifted from the application of Greek (Kagame) or Judeo-Christian classical grids (Mulago and Mbiti) to interrogating the cultural encounters of systems of faith and an example is the work of Oscar Bimwenyi, *Discours théologique négro-africain: Problème des fondements* (1981).

A second effect of these discourses themselves would be a new internal transformation of the theological space by "African Christian feminism," as actualized by Mercy Oduyoye whose work accents the female experience in the Christian Church and offers critical perspectives. Should be mentioned, on the traditional role of women, the demand of gender equality, highlighting women's contribution to theology. On the other hand, within the Church, the ordination and inclusion of women in leadership roles is a situation that has improved since the Anglican Church first ordained women in 1987.

Five

Symbolics of birth and heredity, lineage and succession, extraction and stock, all of them and everywhere are premised on the identification of the female with natality and fecundity. All over the continent the female is expected to convert into a fertile mother. Vincent Mulago, in "Mariage africain et mariage chrétien" (1965:20), projects a reconciliation of perspectives. As background, the family structuration organically is a variation of a canon. This has vitalist sequences integrating and differentiating beings and things. It is organized by an accord between the invisible and the visible. And, reciprocally, by stressing a divine origin of the original source of claims, linking subsequent heroic figures, the souls of the family members and the telluric forces and spirits assuming them.

The ordering of the interdependence of the visible and invisible involves the telluric, and the dynamics of vital forces emanate from a divine source. In other words, marriage is a symbol of "the perennity and expansion of life within a clanic group; a life that through a founding ancestor descends from, and is sustained by God."² The ceremony of marriage is a life-affirming proclamation by inscriptions that transcend the couple. It is a process of symbolic acts (it requires two genealogies and involves all of its descendents). It is more a father–mother relation, than a husband–wife nexus (the first child, remarkably a boy, makes it effective). At any rate, it is not of the profane nature, but of the sacred, and all these norms found themselves reflected in various mythic corpus from the region.

Discourses on religion and the family relate to a foundational orthodoxy; and the second, to Islamic interferences with a traditional polysemic structure. God's presence in its permanence is perceived as maternal. From Senegal, Henri Gravrand, in *Religions africaines et christianisme* (CERA, 1979), comments on "La prière sère," has this small sequence of a prayer to God:

God-Woman, Sene.
 God-Man, Sene.
 The one you don't lead to death, and doesn't die.
 The one you don't tie (1979:11).

In *La notion de Dieu chez les Baluba du Kasai* (1956) Raoul van Caeneghem details an identical information. The Lubas have several proper names for God, and a few of them present God as female and a mother. Legends and mythological stories invoke frequently a She-God, unique and omnipotent, a jealous God who is the incarnation of knowledge. Related to God is the self-engendered *Mikombo*, a figuration of the divine, self-incarnated in the body of his mother, *Kalowa*. The idea of a God who is both male and female is widespread. According to an esoteric version of Luba-Songye creation, *Maweja* the divinity, father and mother, bridges the world into existence in two seasons, a rainy and a dry one, creating the world with paired entities in two successive creations. Reversing each time the structuration of beings in relation to seniority, they are male and female, and in sequences that reverse gender rapports. To a precedent union of the male and

the female, there is a new order positing the female first, and so on. As the story goes, they are male and female, brother and sister, husband and wife, and that explains, “Why our lords used to marry their sisters.”³ At the genesis, myths classified by Harold Scheub’s *Dictionary of African Mythology* (2000) have good series in which God is close to women(’s?) ethos.

Six

A reflection on origins also addressed time. Mention has just been made of Peter Rigby’s research. Mbiti (1997), in *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*, argued on the category of no time in African cultures. However, the languages spoken around Lake Victoria call Mbiti’s claims into question because they distinguish between the past, present, and the future.

	<i>Yesterday</i>	<i>Today</i>	<i>Tomorrow</i>
<i>Kirundi</i>	éjo	uno muusi	éjo
<i>Maa</i>	naarri	taata	taaisere
<i>Mashi</i>	indjo	ere	irhondo
<i>Swahili</i>	jana	leo	kesho
<i>Yira (Kinande)</i>	muligholo	munabwire	omunja

Source: Faculté Catholique de Kinshasa. Religions traditionnelles africaines. Projet du société (1997).

Hyppolite Ngimbi Nseka notes that the Kikongo language (a) distinguishes neatly past, present, and future; (b) it recognizes empirical dimensions: day (*lumbu*), week (*lumingu*), month (*ngonda*), season (*nsungi*), and year (*mvu*); (c) Kikongo language offers a dual system to each speaker, a traditional system of a week of four days, along with that of seven days, internalized from contact with the West. Peter Rigby (1985) elaborates the precision with which temporal categories are handled in everyday life in Maasai culture. For instance, (a) the term for *today* can be specified as nowadays, usually, or later on, etc.; (b) the *past*, as a little time ago, awhile, recently, longer than recently, etc.; (c) the *future*, as a short time, anytime coming, an indefinite future.

Each category has more than a particular concept in the language (*Maa*). Rigby draws from Frans Mol’s 1978 *Maa Dictionary of the Maasai Language and Folklore*, to detail a one-year system of twelve months, each divided into thirty days, subdivided into lunar periods. The symbolic tasks of the culture associates “daylight and women” and “the night and men.” Finally, the system of age-sets and references to the temporal succession of religious authorities allows for a historical construction that goes back a few centuries. In brief, a conjunction of age-set chronology and genealogy of leaders, along linguistic proofs of contacts with other ethnic groups, brings about a clear temporalization of a cultural history. Rigby points out that one reconstruction went some

ten generations in the past, until the mid-seventeenth century. This would account for one of the ways a religious imperative can activate a secular memory. Using oral history to explore past mythical sphere validates simultaneously its capacity for legitimating time that invests the present, and reflects back on its imagined genesis.⁴ In *La terre africaine et ses religions*, Louis-Vincent Thomas and René Luneau synthesize the debate on time in a capsule on: “A Phenomenology of Initiation.” It could be read as arguing that the institution of initiation doesn’t need to prove its efficacy within a temporal framework. From this perspective, as expounded in the book, a concept and a rite, initiation structures the times in life. Illustrated as defined by empirical categories that isolate privileged moments, it moderates antithetic but complementary interactions between the sacred and the profane. At master level, the code that unites mythical time versus concrete actual time stands against its own trans-historical dimension. It negotiates the validity of rituals in the present and maximizes the effective value of traditional religious norms demonstrating that the cosmic arises from human experience.

Indeed, this interpretative grid is structured in binary and intercommunicative oppositions. There are figurative angles that in real life reference empirical categories: elder versus junior, male versus female, adult versus child; and all these structural variations register a conflictual temporal distance. By itself or in relation to another pair, the first term articulates the representation of a particular distinction that can be temporalized. As a starting point, it presents a picture to envision the singularity of a time. Thus, in elder versus junior, the time of a generation; in adult versus child, that of a socialization; in male versus female, that of rights conformed by a tradition. Privileges give an explanation to a deviation that illuminates a type and quality of time. They cohere in their reference to mechanics implied by the tension represented in order versus disorder in nature and culture that any initiation instrumentalizes from figures of symbolic death, the absolute threshold to any norm. One could hypothesize on the essentials of initiations from three sets of elements.

First, knowledge is transmitted about symbolic networks—scripts, pictographic, masks, spaces, lines—and manners of decoding them. On the socio-historical inscriptions in Islamic transcultural challenges and politics of presence, tradition lasts long and confirms the incomparable.⁵ Two, rituals bring together interacting universes, a visible and an invisible one; the primacy of the invisible universe and the existence of a supreme being and points to an immanent principle of solidarity between the universes. Elaborations focus on the notion of vital force and its interactive capacity between universes, nature and culture; the uniting principle of participation at the heart of this dynamic; and finally, symbols of a universal mediation. Ritual meanings accommodate verbal and nonverbal bodies of knowledge. The occult that fascinates ethnographers may not be cardinal after all. The search for the ultimate goes on in the creative fuzziness of everyday creativity.

Second, from a realist understanding of Durkheim’s lesson, any ritual is a social instruction with entries that are variable, and effective because their moral meaning and expression reflects initial norms of initiation in which death is the condition of a rebirth. Scholarly discourses on African religious experience describe the object they study as both profane and sacred when dealing with rituals, which portray the world of ancestors.

Finally, on the acts themselves, a commonsense approach imposed itself and was problematized in light of work done on the subject such as *Exploring the Logic of Faith* by Kent Bental and Frederick Ferré (1968), and this statement from Ferré:

What, for example, would be meant by someone's affirming or denying that Christian faith "involves" belief? Shall we interpret this involvement as strict logical entailment, in the same sense that the premises of a syllogism "involve" the conclusion? Shall we understand this term as denoting psychological involvement, more akin to the way in which Helen's love for John "involves" an interest in sports? Or are we to acknowledge or deny some other kind of "involvement" between faith and belief? (1968:27)

Religious experience—this or that lived experience of fear or joy—would be the test between what cultural comparatists oppose, African "fideism" and Western "rationalism," and Western "rationalism" and African "fideism." From the language of Henri Maurier's (1976) *Philosophie de l'Afrique noire*, one can emphasize the tension between the logos, which, in the Western experience, became *un verbe intérieur universel* and the generality of a hypothesized African experience, *une véritable parole entre personnes*. This tension problematizes itself in the demands it conveys. One can affirm that in what is opposed to the Christian logos, an African style of declining and of speaking, a manner of this new *parole* includes both an ancient narration, and its duplication (*mimesis*). In testifying to the letter, both the agnostic scholar and the African believer advance an observation and the mystery that silently goes beyond it. To illustrate the vision, consider Jacob K. Olupona's anthology of "religious" texts, *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings and Expression* (2000), and the type of attention it gains from the qualification of the person who signs statements, and vice-versa. Part one deals with "Cosmologies and sacred knowledge," part two, with "Authority, Agencies, and Performance;" part three, with "Africans' Encounter with Other Religions;" and part four, "African Spirituality in the Americas."

The editor Jacob K. Olupona argues that the spiritual space covered by the chapters presents a pluralist perspective on spirituality. Three remarks: first, this geographically diverse anthology generates an open-ended work simultaneously circumscribed vis-à-vis what it is not, frontiers on cosmologies and sacred knowledge. Second, contributions written by specialists affiliated with departments of religion are courses in social sciences, and mainly in anthropology. This fact would justify why Islamists mark explicitly the singularity of their expertise. Third, the challenge of the anthology corresponds to the flexibility of its notion of spirituality, its religious valuation.

Other texts also accent inclusivity. For example; in Bolaji Campbell's *Paintings for the Gods* (2008), the essay on women creations and the spirituality of the world origin, accords itself well to Olupona's part one on cosmology; and, at the same time, engage MacGaffey's statements on art and spirituality. Second example, on symbolics of Mami Wata and spirituality, and veneration of spirits meet Sandra E. Greene's research on *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter: A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana* (2002). Sites in landscapes tell a history of a political resistance and the spiritual significance of reincarnation rituals among the Anlo-Ewe people appears weakened by the mediating influence of Christianity. Finally, in rapport with parts three and four of the anthology, on encounters of spiritualities, the historically oriented *Central African Cultural Transformation* edited by Linda M. Heywood (2002) authorize both Greene's

argument and another tapestry of interpretations about African-based communities in the Americas.

Descriptive statements or testimony on religious experience or on spirituality are ways of rephrasing the question of systems of rituals improperly named traditional religion. Along with their spirituality, they are not more traditional than any other system. In the introduction to *Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion* (1967), Frederick Geffré argues: spirituality is “one’s way of valuing most comprehensively and intensively” (1967:82). The definition is presented at the end of a series of resolutions of *scope* (to be ideally, inclusive and specific in defining it); and, of *cruciality*, to consider religion as unspecialized (for people), hospitable (in doctrine and practice), permissible (in roles), open (on will to truth), unprejudiced (in its effects). Ghanaian theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye, in *The Way* (2004), discusses from a personal perspective, “The African Experience of God by asking if God takes side and on whose side is God? God is on the side of the weak.” She emphasizes plurality by pointing out that experiences of God are different in the daily lives of people.

Seven

In Durkheim’s 1912 *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Field’s translation, 1995), where ritual activity engages the profane and the sacred, one sees the limits of an easy explanation in relation to itself as a language, especially if one considers the debates on African rituals as symbolic languages in their own right. Relating the tension between the sacred and the profane to ethically charged couples, of good and evil, health and sickness, life and death, Durkheim insists that “by contrast, the sacred and the profane are always and everywhere conceived by the human intellect as separate genera, as two worlds with nothing in common” (1912:36). For Durkheim, the task was to face two different domains: a physical and concrete one and a spiritual and transcendent universe. In the case of rituals, when transcending that which separates them, the profane interacts with the sacred; this happening inducts a controversy between aspects of death and rebirth, and “a transformation *totius substantiae*.” Durkheim’s critical view concerns itself with a tension that opposes two areas, and rituals that represent “the contagiousness of the sacred,” within birth or naming celebrations, initiation or death (1912:322).

A language spells out its own functional metaphors that today’s anthropological or theological grids may trust or reverse in a novel approximation. For example, in most communities in the area of Great Lakes, one might refer first, to the death of the father or mother, second, the ritual of legitimating an inheritor; and third, the rituals renewing authority in an ancestral patrimony, to refer to some rites, not noted so far such as death rituals from different parts of East Africa. Mbiti’s text, which still serves widely in the areas as an authoritative explanatory argument on the relation between this world, its materiality, and the beyond conjured by death. One would test it by revisiting correlations between myth and rituals, among the Gikuyu and Bukusu communities, and among the BaKiga and Batagweenda in the Ugandan West. Death does not erase life but it is a discontinuity that ironically transforms life. In the BaKiga myth of origin,

death was issued forth by an animus between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law and led to the definitive demise of the first, changing death from a perpetual process of resurrection and rejuvenation to a closure and an object of fear. The Batagweenda's view of death illustrates a theme and its variations, precisely on the hostility of two co-wives. The negative confrontation engenders a violence that ends human immortality, and as the local wisdom goes, since then, "the dead have no business in resurrecting."

The stories declare a number of things, including dying as a process, a sign. First, with reference to myths, one can decode reasons for distrusting in-laws within a given structure, and its connection to interethnic prejudice. De-contextualized and overvalued in missionizing procedures, the structural function of a female presence at the origin of death became a symbolic key to adapted teachings of the biblical original sin. Secondly, the function serving an admission of negotiation in exogamic rulings between communities, may take on a political value in institutionalizing interethnic hostility.

Thirdly, death affirms existence, as a gift of life; the union of a body and that something-else, that flame that goes out with passing. A good death would accord itself to two inscriptions: the world of ancestors and that of generations to come. The mystery of death articulates itself in the visible it brings about first, the line of this world, the down-here, this *ensi*; and the up-there of astral bodies and divinities, the *eiguru*; vis-à-vis the *okuzimu*, the subterranean universe of those who have left our time. This line of existence, that of a biological genealogy from a yesterday to the tomorrow of children and their future, is a social axis of continuity that traces also a spiritual genealogy and a chronological sense of permanence signified in the name that passes from one generation to another. Finally, this last line testifies to a collective consciousness. Funeral rituals and the mourning period renews the coherence of a community as a living communion and regulates all the processes of good deaths.

The clarity of such a narrative raise more questions about itself, than on the perception of rituals, in relation to death as a matrix from which to access an African view of the gift of life. Three types of awareness could illuminate the problem. Before anything else, from the experience of belonging or not belonging to the BaKiga or the Batagweenda communities, there is what these communities authenticate in their own explanation. There is also, what the codes might say in the conflict of intercultural admissions testifying to dynamics of an ongoing history, and what this implies about its own sovereignty. Indeed, primary explanations are reinterpreted, as arguments should be tested against other codes, and thus allow a re-visitation of Durkheim's classification of rituals, its implication for the interference of the profane and the sacred, and the impunity it refers to.

Eight

Any religious position brings up the question of death and eschatology. Mbiti (1969:25) argued that death took a person from the *sasa* (now) period to the *zamani* (past or long ago). However, in some places in Africa, the dead go into a future and a new world. The view that dead persons are remembered by their names indicates that they do not disappear into the past as Mbiti claims. Most people would agree that death in Africa is

a rite of passage when the soul moves to a spiritual world. When a good person dies, relatives celebrate that person's life. Burial rites differ. For example, some clans in the Bukusu community bury the dead in a sitting position so that the individual will communicate with spirits in the underworld. The dead continue their lives in the next world and share with the living who must name their children after the departed. Children so named are believed to have the attributes of the ancestors. Certain rituals are carried out if the dead person was associated with misfortunes like barrenness, impotency, or evil things like witchcraft, robbery, among others. In any case, death is both a discontinuity and a rebirth.

Namugongo in Uganda can organize a setting in which several paths to understanding meet using symbols that embodies the inseparable sides of a sign about life and death as illustrated in the variations of the foundational sagas of Kintu and the upsurge of Walumbe, death. (Benjamin C. Ray, 1991). One of them, the Kiwendo, used to drive the absolute sovereignty of the King. Now, Namugongo arrests the voice of a memory and its reason, accounting for and signifying new ethnicities. Some of them are religious bodies covered by the blood of those martyred in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. First, Muslims, in 1876 under King Mutesa; and later, those killed in 1886 and 1887, and the best known (12 Catholics, 13 Protestants, 5 non-Christians), on June 3, 1886, under Mwanga; sanctified deaths that has created an exemplary fellowship, an "ethnicity," and many sources attest that the victims were killed primarily because of their beliefs. The Reverend J.F. Faupel titled his testimony an *African Holocaust* (1962). These deaths commend now veneration in a transcultural imaginary. The three sanctuaries of Namugongo—Church of Uganda (Anglican), Catholic, Mosque—articulate the force of an Abrahamic canon that transcends cultural differences. The Namugongo deaths have shaped opinions about rites and funerals in the region. A monument to Ugandan acts of faith; it seems to exhaust particularisms moderating the three competing Abrahamic identities of the majority of the country. It accords itself to a cultural consciousness. Jean-Pierre Chrétien and Jean-Louis Triaud (1999) emphasize the value of the symbol, its effectiveness in Uganda self-perception and how the sanctuaries comfort a sentiment of pride, and a way of believing and dying.

Namugongo administers an imaginary and a way of existing. It represents an extreme testimony that can support a peaceful death in a hospital or elsewhere. Anthropologists still contend to describe the most authentic forms. The Christian effect on cultures cannot be negated. From a variety of models, and based on interfering postulates, we present a schema that reflects the progression and the transitions of life from birth to death.

Figure 2.1, inspired by a schema in Louis-Vincent Thomas and René Luneau, *Les sages dépossédés* (Laffont, 1977: 26), tracks this movement step by step with two entries that depict the ritualization of life and the death event. Instead of accenting the discontinuous character of passages and their rituals, it makes them inscriptions in the process of life, connectives of the seasons. This figure provides a more visible metaphoric identification of birth and death in relation to ancestorship. Sometimes, it is wrongly, it seems, associated with reincarnation. The process initiated from A reads a biological line that ends in B'. The line from B to A' recommences it, but symbolically. It is according to what B signifies that the word resurrection refers to in some cultures.



Figure 2.1 The progression and the transitions of life from birth to death.

The dynamics of the symbols is played out vividly during the mourning period that tames the shadow. An ambiguous ceremony takes place in two areas simultaneously. Inside the house of the defunct, a space of obscurity in which women lament the end of a life; outside, in a space of light, men remember the passing of a life. The two spaces reflect each other by their three functions that ethnographic studies reveal: (a) the affirmation of the social phylum, in relation to a discontinuity in the blood life; and, apropos a good death, an ovation for the harmonious communion it is supposed to witness to, between the living and the ancestors; (b) a commemoration of the interdependent rapports between the past and the present, the community and its physical environment; (c) a solemnization of the clanic unity and the public recognition of a coherence signified in rounds of redistribution of wealth. To the sadness of a disruptive death, a festive atmosphere affects the cohesion of the community.

A visible tension exists between the symbolic and the biological in the will to explain death by postulating a malevolent agent within the community, complicated by distinguishing between witchcraft from sorcery. Attentive to Geoffrey Parrinder's

discussion in *Witchcraft European and African* (Faber and Faber, 1970), two thinkers have made a point of unmasking the semantic instability of the notion: Barry Hallen and J. Olubi Sodipo's *Knowledge, Belief, and Witchcraft* (1997), by deconstructing it; and Elias Kifon Bongmba, a theologian, in his *African Witchcraft and Otherness* (2001), by testing its limitations in the translation of *tfu*, which, among the Wimbun of Cameroon, is said to cause illness or death as people employ an intrinsically uncertain concept to cover enmities or justify entanglements in power rivalry. In his doctoral dissertation in social sciences on *Pokot Masculinity: The Role of Rituals in Forming Men* (2006), Kjartan Jonsson includes without comment an appendix on how to become a sorcerer. Bongmba explores ways of a rational concern.

Retracing this ordinary way of dying seems a good manner of addressing a variety of cultural patterns, of interrogating the framework for its interpretation, and how such an African death can be conceptualized vis-à-vis other styles in dehumanized circumstances. Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross' classical studies on death (1969, 1975) present a grid of five stages: one, denial (shock); two, anger (emotion); three, bargaining; four, preparatory (depression); five, acceptance (increased self-reliance) (1969:264, 1975:161). The research project was aimed, says the author, at an understanding of "the religious dynamics behind the denial process, and the terminally ill patient's resistance to moving to an acceptance." One might hypothesize that such an attitude surely would be class and culturally determined. But, there is a surprise: a Swahili intervention, figurative or real, the testimony of a Mwalimu Imara about a dying patient at the University of Chicago Hospital, precedes the conclusion of *Death: The Final Stage of Growth*. For an explanation, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross turns to Gordon Allport's idea of an "ego-extension" as what might account for some individual capacity in going-through the five stages. Would not such a diagnosis be universal from the supposition of Dr. Kübler-Ross: "a 'unifying philosophy of life which may or may not be religious, but in any event, has to be a frame of meaning and of responsibility into which life's major activities fit'? It need not be 'articulated in words nor entirely complete. But without direction or coherence, supplied by some dominant, integrative pattern, life seems fragmented and aimless.'" (1975:162) In Kübler-Ross' language, the challenge of identity, commitment and direction as expounded in Allport's *Personality and Social Encounter* (1964), and *His religion* (1950) constitute the frame from which to approach the experience of the dying.

There is an apparent irony in summoning such a reference that seems proper to a particular culture, in order to comment on African death, and face competing death-grids. One, in common: the Christian model and the transcultural code of Kübler-Ross' stages of dying. Two, in difference: the descriptive schemes one faces in examining the research of Canon Y.K. Bamunoba and Barthélémy Adoukounou, *La Mort dans la vie africaine* (1979). For these two ecclesiastics, death would have a popular predicate in Africa. It can be by a quotation from a report of Kjartan Jónsson, "If you died because of somebody, let him follow" (1979:262). Three, L.V. Thomas, *Anthropologie de la mort* (1977) illustrates the paradoxical truth of a symbolical line quasi-identical with that of a life course.

New Meanings of Death (1977), edited by the psychologist Herman Feifel, of the Veterans Administration Outpatient Clinic in Los Angeles, could be invoked along with

Dr. Kübler-Ross' work, as a clinical approach in principle applicable elsewhere. Consider the following from Feifel's introduction: "surprisingly, religious predisposition per se doesn't appear to be associated significantly with the strength of fear of death;" (1977:10) and also, of Feifel's: "mastery over death is gained symbolically by killing conquering death." (1977:11) These propositions can be applied to any context. One might evaluate differently the metaphors articulating the psychologist David Guttman's transcultural vision in "Dying to Power and the Search for Self-Esteem," a chapter of the book. The dynamics described supposedly apprehend attitudes of the Navajo's medicine man, the Australian Aborigines, the overestimated power of Nigerian tribal elders, etc. All these variations in abnormal attitudes vis-à-vis death, according to Guttman, seem to be doors to the unsaid, linked to ego-death metaphors.

Nine

How, and on what account, may one distinguish a discipline one practices, from what it implies about both the interconnection between the profane and the sacred, and their conceptual distinction, and what such a measure entails vis-à-vis the demands of ethics and of one's culture? Indeed, one would be required to dissociate being this particular human from the experiential authority of the BaKiga or Batagweenda's explanation of their religion, lived today as their demonstration. When talking about God, asks Gerhard Sauter (1996), doesn't one reasonably ask, does the interpreter "expound something other than himself?" (1996:76). The point would be to justify a transcending demand without *a priori* disqualifying BaKiga or Batagweenda claims to the same privilege. The question, when testing the ambiguity of any reading concerning interactions between the sacred and the profane, centers on a right to a primordial privilege of experience within a cultural context, versus the imperatives of methods about its explanation.

Classical, in approach, is the historian's, which moves from the explicit of religious statements to the unconscious of their organic structuration in the past. And, on the other hand, a different procedure, the anthropologist immersing herself within the unconscious of the BaKiga's system of beliefs, and then getting out to comment on it with the authority of another type of experience: "I was there." From the two angles, when uncritical, any interpretation relies on an incredible erasure, that of being human, and its original voice. One could reproblematicize the debate, as it is synthesized from the lesson of Claude Lévi-Strauss, and reformulate it by accenting the alienation of the student of religion who exemplifies the normativity of an expected reason and its postulates. Paul Ricoeur has called it in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004) the crowning of a conceptual epic. In his reading, the speculative dimension of humanity is sealed in "the dialectic of the objective spirit that the pact between the rational and the real is sealed, the pact that is said to be an expression of the highest idea of philosophy" (2004:300). Critical steps are induced here. They state an order of problems. First, in relation to the historical practice that metaphorically inhabits "the house of the dead," and secondly, to Nietzsche's posture "in praise of life" that can be linked to "Heidegger's opposition between the having-been of the authentic past and the elapsed past that escapes our grasp." As suggested by Paul Ricoeur, the perspective demands a

re-estimation of the Enlightenment about the “birth of a secular religion.” Rightly, he insists, it can be related after Koselleck to “the equation between history and reason.” The ruptures induced lead to both the notion of human plurality, and a reformulation of the paradigmatic conceptualization of humanity’s history in this reading of differences. Such seems the problem of any approach to an explanation of the question raised by Gerhard Sauter.

In the 1980s, within the larger framework of an African practice of theology, a number of currents asserted themselves, and among the most significant, a presence with a *Charter of Feminist Principles for Africanists* (2006), and the *We Belong Here, Too*, with African Muslim Feminism, in feminist theory of the same year. They had been preceded by The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians initiated by the Ghanaian Mercy Amba Oduyoye. One must add to the notion of African traditional religion, three main types of thematics: (a) African theology in connection with the United States’ thematics of Black theology, its domain divided according to methodology and political negotiations about the letter, and the Christian mission in societies; (b) third-world theology which organizes itself according to paths relating the sacred and the profane in the cause of equality and justice; and finally, (c) contextual theology with its focus on the very tradition.

There are now domains different from trends that contributed to their conditions of possibility. One would recall orders of discourse that have been dominating the explanation. First, from participants’ observations and comparisons of beliefs and practices, one has descriptions aimed at rendering an African reality within its context. In 1964, Darryl Forde edited *African Worlds*, which has become a classic of the genre providing re-actualizations of traditional cosmologies and descriptions within their conceptual frame and structurations. So is the presentation of Marcel Griaule’s *Dieu d’eau* (1948). Vincent Monteil’s *L’Islam noir* (1964) and *Les Prêtres noirs s’interrogent* (1957) are interdisciplinary approaches worth considering as one revisits past works on the tradition for an understanding of its authenticity.

Notes

- 1 The lines of this introductory critical approach to the expressions of African religions through rituals are completely independent from the analytical views presented in the *Encyclopedia of African Religions* that one of us has been editing. Sincere gratitude to Elias Bongmba for his sense of direction. Trip Attaway deserves grateful acknowledgment for his unfailing patience and efficiency, and Navid Naderi, for his critical reading of proofs.
- 2 Vincent Mulago, *La Religion traditionnelle des Bantus et leur vision du monde* (Presses Universitaires du Zaïre, 1973:137).
- 3 J.A. Tiarko Fourche and Henri Morlighem, *Une Bible noire* (Max Arnold, 1970).
- 4 See also Edward Evans-Pritchard, “Nuer Time” (*Africa*, 12, 1939).
- 5 Louis Brenner, *Muslim Identity in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Hurst and Company, 1993).

CHAPTER 3

Neo-Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism

Perspectives from the Social Sciences

Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff

Prolegomenon

Herewith three glimpses into the new religious world order.

The *First* is from *Post-apartheid* South Africa

The New Life Church is to be found in Mafikeng, in the North West Province. Founded just before the fall of *apartheid*, it typifies a brand of upbeat, technically-hyped Pentecostalism that is aspiring to fill the moral void left by a withering of revolutionary ideals and civic norms in the postcolony. While New Life is the creation of a talented pair of pastors, a husband and wife who have shaped it independently of denominational oversight, their community belongs to the International Federation of Christian Churches; this is a global network of congregations, all of which combine a lively charismatic realism with a frank materiality, the latter embodied in a subject not embarrassed by this-worldly desire. Congregants pay a tithe, and are encouraged to expect that their investment, both spiritual and monetary, will yield tangible empowerment. They are offered a range of services, from marriage guidance to financial counseling that recast the pastoral in a distinctly service-oriented, therapeutic key. As in many such movements, the stress on divine manifestation is accompanied by a preoccupation with cutting-edge media: "It might sound heretical," notes the founding pastor, "but we strive above all to make our services exciting, affecting. Our competition, after all, is the video arcade, the movie house, and the casino." (Remember the casino. We shall return to it.) In New Life's sparkling suburban sanctuary, a sophisticated sound stage replaces the altar. Services are punctuated by lilting hymns and love songs to Jesus, crooned by a modishly dressed, youthful band—or "worship team"—equipped with electronic instruments. Overhead, a large karaoke screen flashes the lyrics; in a booth

to the rear, a technician monitors the acoustics. Meetings draw large crowds that span a wide spectrum of race, age, and class. They center on stylized personal testimonies that narrate, in psychological terms, a self-reborn into an individualized world of transparency, purpose, and prosperity.

The *Second* comes from Post-Soviet Russia

The messiah has arrived. He is to be found, by his own account, in East Siberia, wherein lies “the Promised Land of the Future.” More prosaically, he lives in a compound near Minusinsk. Sergei Torop by name, he prefers to be called Vissarion. He has his own webpage,¹ on which he explains that Vissarion—also the name of Stalin’s father—means “giving the life” in “the language of the Universe.” In the event that that language is not understood by ordinary mortals, seven more conventional vernaculars convey his cyber-message, which promises that his Word will soon spread across the World. The 38-year-old, ethereal-looking savior established the Last Testament Church in 1991, after the repressed memory of two millennia flooded back to him, after he came to realize that he was not the child of Siberian construction workers but the Son of God, after he learned that “all religions are inserted in him;” the origin myth of the movement, significantly, dates these revelations roughly to the fall of the USSR. Vissarion has acquired a substantial following, the Vissariontsi, composed largely of “disenchanted [former] Soviet intellectuals and idealists.” While their exact number is uncertain, they have attracted the attention of the Orthodox Church, which is monitoring them carefully; also of the state, which has left them alone thus far, largely because the arrival of the church has breathed life into a dying local economy. The movement, which is rooted in agribusiness, has a strong green orientation, seeing itself as “A Siberian Global Experiment targeting Human Survival under Circumstances of Social and Natural Cataclysm.”

Vissarion himself was a traffic warden until he turned messiah, persuaded his disciples to hand over their earthly wealth to him, and established the City of Sun, which is what he calls his rural dominion. This dominion is reminiscent of a Soviet collective although it has formed a joint stock company, Tabrat Ltd., to bankroll its material existence. In short, the Second Coming here envisages a future in the past, a hereafter (or there-before?) that revivifies the glories of a socialist commune by lodging it securely in the global capitalist economy. Vissarion has not escaped skepticism. He has been portrayed as an enchanted entrepreneur who earns a lucrative income from service delivery in the God business, a business flourishing anew in these turbulent times, a business, suggests Tom Whitehouse,² that often yields high profits to its High Priests: Torop, he goes on to note, lives in *very* lavish circumstances. No wonder that Orthodox clergy see him as an “evil pyramid schemer,” an image which we shall have cause to revisit. Whether or not he is a charlatan, a con man with a Christ-like appearance and a creative line in income redistribution, is beside our present point. The various features of his religious movement—its corporate scaffolding, its entry into the world of the joint stock venture, its presence on the web, its global outreach, its appeal to technical solutions for planetary problems, its promise of instant redemption at a price in hard

currency, its well-requited head of operations—are all of a piece. They tell a story at once very old and very new.

The *Third* is from a Post-Christendom America

In Columbus, Indiana, a small town some four hours drive from Chicago on Highway 64, there is an extraordinary array of churches. Columbus is known for its public architecture because the local captains of industry came to a decision, at some point in the past, to make their town into a shrine to the built form. As a result, many internationally famous “names” erected buildings across the flatlands of this otherwise unprepossessing corner of the Midwest. One of them is a profoundly beautiful, profoundly spiritual, edifice. Designed by Eero Saarinen, the North Christian Church houses a congregation of Disciples of Christ, whose journal, *Cutting Edge*, is unusually revealing. Volume 29 no. 2 of 2000 is dedicated to the topic of “Buildings for the Post-Christendom Church” (Blankenship, 2000:1–2). “Christendom,” it declares, “is dying” (2000:1). What began in the fourth century of the common era is over, a new reformation is under way. But what, precisely, are its signs? Among other things, “the adoption of market driven planning to replace tradition” appeals to a generation that wants “choices, convenience, quality, and specialized services” in religion as in everything else (2001:2; after Schaller, 1999). By extension, church facilities, like prayer itself, require “above all [to be] useful, adaptable, and marketable.” And so, in the most conservative crannies of Christian America, the church enters the new millennium by making common cause not with a capitalist ethos grounded in virtuous work, in the production of the self through the production of value, but with a world of convenience and consumption, of free choice and flexibility; a world in which the provision of services, religious services like other customer services, is paramount.

Each of these vignettes evokes the ghost of Max Weber. Each speaks of a new moment in the history of capitalism, of its Second Coming, this time in neoliberal guise, this time on an even more global scale than before. They also speak of a new religious spirit to go with that moment, a spirit which, as we shall see, is rampant in Africa. But not only in Africa. Note that our three instances come from what used to be called, respectively, the third, second, and first worlds.

All of which raises a number of conundrums for our understanding of economy and society, culture and history, faith and identity at the end of the old century and the start of the new. Some of the corollaries of the Second Coming of which we speak—“plagues of the ‘new world order’,” Derrida (1994:91) calls them—have occasioned heated debate. Thus, for example, populist polemics have dwelt on the planetary conjuncture, for good or ill, of “homogenization and difference” (e.g. Barber, 1992); on the simultaneous, synergistic spiraling of wealth and poverty; on the rise, like a disfigured phoenix, of a “new medievalism” (Brownlee et al., 1991; cf. Connelly and Kennedy, 1994). For its part, scholarly debate has focused on the confounding effects of rampant liberalization: on whether it engenders truly transnational flows of capital or drains them off to a few major sites (Hirst and Thompson, 1996); on whether it weakens, sustains, or reinvents the nation-state (Sassen, 1996); on whether it frees up, curbs, or

compartmentalizes the movement of labor; on whether the current fixation with democracy, its resurrection in so many places, betokens a measure of mass empowerment or an “emptying out of [its] meaning” (Negri, 1999:9; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1997). Equally in question is why the present infatuation with civil society has been accompanied by alarming increases in civil strife; why, in like vein, the politics of consumerism, human rights, and entitlement has coincided with puzzling new patterns of exclusion, patterns that refract long-established lines of gender, sexuality, race, and class (Gal, 1997; Yudice, 1995); why, also, there has been a palpable rise in many countries of domestic violence, rape, child abuse, prison populations and, most dramatically of all, criminal “phantom-states” (Derrida, 1994:83; Blaney and Pasha, 1993) forms of organized crime, that is, which mimic the state, arrogating its powers and providing some of its services for a fee.

Other features of our present predicament are less remarked. Among them are the odd coupling of the legalistic with the libertarian, constitutionality with deregulation, and—at the core of our concerns here—hyper-rationalization with the exuberant spread of innovative occult practices and money magic, pyramid schemes and prosperity gospels; the enchantments, that is, of a decidedly *neoliberal* economy, whose ever more inscrutable speculations seem to call up fresh specters in their wake. Note that, unlike others who have discussed the “new spectrality” of that economy (Negri, 1999:9; Sprinker, 1999), we do not talk here in metaphorical terms. We seek, instead, to draw attention to the distinctly pragmatic qualities of the messianic and the millennial; not merely in the tenor of organized religion, of which we shall have a lot to say, but of capitalism itself as a gospel of salvation. As this suggests, in speaking of Millennial Capitalism we intend not merely capitalism at the millennium—capitalism, that is, in its chronological contemporaneity—but also capitalism in its messianic, salvific, even magical manifestations; capitalism as a cultural and moral economy with the capacity, if harnessed properly, to enrich the poor and further enrich the wealthy, to solve social problems, to heal the sick, to elicit divine favor, to add material value to the commonweal.

The question, patently, is why? Why has capitalism taken on these features? What is new about them? And how, exactly, have they reconfigured the religious world in their wake? It is on this last issue that we focus here.

Let us, then, cut to the heart of the matter. If we are to understand the spirits of our age, the place to begin, as Marx noted for another historical juncture, is with epochal shifts in the constitutive relationship of production to consumption. This is *not* to say that the essence of neoliberal capitalism is reducible purely to that relationship. Quite the opposite: there is now a large literature on the various dimensions of the new global economy—from the workings of the electronic commons and transnational corporations; through the changing, labile character of work and labor, its mobility and its transience, its gendered and generational inflections; to the impact of space-time compression, of flexible accumulation, and of the planetary flow of signs, styles, and commodities upon old sovereignties, old loyalties, old identities. All of these things are crucially important in understanding the shape of the world we live in (see Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000). For now, however, we have perforce to take them for granted. In any case, we would suggest, it is specifically by interrogating the shifting articulation

of production to consumption, of the *pro* to the *con* in capitalist economics, that we might make sense of the emergence of new forms of enchantment—and of the kinds of Neoprotestantism to which they appear to be giving rise in postcolonial Africa. And elsewhere.

Capitalism at the Millennium, Millennial Capitalism

Consumption, recall, was the hallmark disease of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Of a time when the ecological conditions of production, its consuming passions, ate up the bodies of producers. Now, at the end of the twentieth, semiotically transposed, it is often said to be the “hallmark of modernity,” the measure of its wealth, health, and vitality. An over-generalization? Maybe. Yet the claim *does* capture popular imaginings. It also resonates with the growing Eurocultural truism that the (post) modern person is a subject made with objects. Nor is this surprising. Consumption, in its ideological guise—as “consumerism” refers to a material sensibility actively cultivated, for the common good, by western states and commercial interests, particularly since World War II. Also by some noncapitalist regimes: in the early, 1990s, even Deng Xiaoping advocated “consumption as a motor force of production” (Oirlik, 1996:194).

In social theory, as well, consumption has become a Prime Mover (van Binsbergen and Geschiere, n.d.:3). Increasingly, it is *the* factor, *the* principle, held to determine definitions of value and the construction of identities. As such, tellingly, it is the invisible hand that animates the political and material imperatives, and the social forms, of the Second Coming of Capitalism. Note the image. The invisible hand. Gone is the *deus ex machina*, a figure altogether too concrete, too industrial for the post-Fordist era.

As consumption has become the moving spirit of the late twentieth century, so there has been a concomitant eclipse of production; an eclipse, at least, of its *perceived* salience for the wealth of nations. This has heralded a shift, across the world, in ordinary understandings of the nature of capitalism. The workplace and labor, especially work-and-place securely rooted in a stable local context, are no longer prime sites for the creation of value or identity (Sennett, 1998). The factory and the shop, far from secure centers of fabrication and family income, are increasingly experienced by virtue of their replacement at the hands of nonhuman or “nonstandard” means of manufacture. Or by their removal to an elsewhere—where labor is cheaper, less assertive, less taxed, more feminized, less protected by states and unions; in South Africa, for example, 80% of employers prefer to hire non-standard workers. Hence the paradox, in many economies, of high official employment rates amidst stark deindustrialization and joblessness. In the upshot, production appears to have been superseded, as the source of wealth, by less tangible ways of generating value: by control over intellectual property, copyrights, franchises, and licenses; by owning the means of communication and the conveyancing of people and things; by the provision of services; and, above all, by the capacity to direct the flow of finance capital.

Symptomatic in this respect, we argue in another essay (2000b), are the changing historical fortunes of gambling. Risk has always been crucial to the growth of “modern” economies. But, removed from the dignifying nexus of the market, it was treated until

recently, alike by Protestant ethics and populist morality, as a “pariah” practice. Casinos were set apart from the workaday world, being situated in liminal places of leisure rather than sites of honest toil. Living off the proceeds of this form of speculation was, normatively speaking, the epitome of immoral accumulation: the wager stood to the wage as sin to virtue. Over a generation, betting, in its marked form, has changed moral valence and invaded everyday existence almost everywhere, being routinized in high risk dealings in stocks, bonds, and funds whose fortunes are governed largely by chance. It also expresses itself in a fascination with “futures” and their populist counterpart, the lottery. Here the mundane meets the millennial: “Not a lotto tomaro,” proclaims an ironic, inner-city mural in Chicago, large hands grasping a pile of casino chips, beside which nestles a motherless baby.³ This at a moment when “gambling [is] the fastest growing industry in the US,” when it is “tightly woven into the national fabric,” when it is increasingly “operated and promoted” by Government.⁴ Indeed, life itself has become the object of bookmaking; it is no longer the sole preserve of the “respectable” insurance industry. Take, by way of an example that has always fascinated us, a report in *Newsweek* from 1999:⁵

In America’s casino culture, no wager is *outré*. So how about betting on how long a stranger is likely to live? You can buy part or all of his or her insurance policy, becoming a beneficiary. Your gamble: that death will come soon enough to yield a high return on the money you put up. The Viatical Association⁶ of America says that \$1 billion worth of coverage went into play last year.

In the era of millennial capitalism, securing instant returns is often a matter of life and death. Also in 1999, the *India Tribune*⁷ reported that one of the Indian states, Madhya Pradesh, was “caught in a vortex of lottery mania” which had led to several suicides; it described “extreme enthusiasm among the jobless youth towards trying their luck to make a fast buck.” More mundanely, efforts to enlist divine help in tipping the odds, from the Taiwanese countryside to the Kalahari fringe, have become a regular feature of what Robert Weller (2000:482) terms “fee for service” religions. These are locally nuanced fantasies of beating capitalism at its own game by drawing a winning number at the behest of unseen forces. Once again that invisible hand.

The change in the moral valence of gambling also has a public dimension. In many countries, lotteries have become a favored means of filling national coffers and generating cultural capital. The defunct machinery of a growing number of welfare states, to be sure, is being turned by the wheel of fortune. With more and more governments depending on this source for quick revenue fixes, says George Will, a well-known conservative commentator in the U.S., betting has “been transformed from a social disease”—subjected, not so long ago, to scrutiny at the hands of Harvard Medical School⁸—“into social policy.”⁹ Once a dangerous sign of moral turpitude, “it is now marketed almost as a patriotic duty.”

And yet crisis after crisis in the global economy, and growing income disparities on a planetary scale, make it painfully plain that there is no such thing as capitalism without production. Apart from all else, Fordist manufacture has *not* disappeared. It has been transformed, articulated with other kinds of productive arrangement,

dispersed and reorganized—with the effect that sites of fabrication have been removed from sites of consumption in such a way as to give the appearance that proletariats, *sensu stricto*, are a thing of the past. This displacement, this rendering absent of visible production, has convinced the likes of Derrida (n.d.; after Rifkin, 1995) that we have reached the end of “the world of work” as we know it; the end of the epoch of *homo faber*, of class consciousness, of the modernist idea of self-construction through virtuous labor. All identities seem to be contrived through self-fashioning, all wealth by means of the entrepreneurial. All of which affirms the putative primacy of consumption. And makes the operations of capital appear arcane, quixotic, magical. If Western scholars have been somewhat slow to reflect on why this is so, their “others” have not; especially those others who live in places where there has been a sudden infusion of commodities, an explosion of new forms of wealth, and a simultaneous shrinking of the labor market. Like South Africa. Many, to be sure, have been quick to give voice to their perplexity at the secret of this wealth: of its sources and the capriciousness of its distribution, of the mysterious forms it takes, of its slipperiness, of the opaque relations between means and ends embodied in it. Our concern here grows directly out of these perplexities: out of world-wide speculation, in both senses of the term, provoked by the shifting conditions of material existence at the end of the twentieth century. The revalorization of speculation, we have also argued before, is itself a corollary of the *experiential* paradox, the doubling, at the core of neoliberal capitalism, of capitalism in its millennial manifestation: the fact that it appears to produce desire on a global scale yet to decrease the certainty of work or the security of persons; that it appears to magnify class differences but to undercut class consciousness; above all, that it appears to offer up vast, almost instantaneous riches to those who master its spectral technologies—and, simultaneously, to threaten the very being of those who do not.

This doubling is most visible in postcolonies; especially in those like South Africa—set free by the events of 1989 and their aftermath—that entered the global arena with distinct structural disadvantages. A good deal is to be learned about the historical implications of the current moment by eavesdropping on the popular anxieties to be heard in such places: on the mounting disenchantment with liberty under libertarian conditions; on the nostalgia for past regimes, some of them immeasurably repressive; on moral panics occasioned by rapidly rising suicide rates; on the upsurge of assertions of identity and autochthony; on the widespread fears, in many parts of Africa, Asia, and Central Europe alike, concerning the apparently preternatural production of wealth. The close of the Cold War—and, in its wake, the death of *apartheid* in South Africa and democratization movements elsewhere on the continent—fired utopian imaginations. But liberation under neoliberal conditions has been marred by a disconcerting upsurge of violence, crime, and disorder. The quest for democracy, the rule of law, prosperity, and civility threatens to dissolve into strife and recrimination, even political chaos. Everywhere there is evidence of an uneasy fusion of enfranchisement and exclusion; of xenophobia at the prospect of world citizenship without the old protectionisms of nationhood; of the effort to realize modern utopias by decidedly postmodern means; of the waxing, in many places, of conspiracy theories; of the fetishization of human rights, the rule of law, and civil society, a construct whose populist

appeal seems everywhere to rise in rough proportion to its inchoateness as a principle of praxis.

Gone is any official-speak of egalitarian futures, work-for-all, or the paternal government envisioned by the freedom movements of yore. Gone, too, is the modernist nation-state as we once knew it; radically transformed, its hyphenation is being ruptured under the impact of global economic and electronic integration, amidst unprecedented flows of people, commodities, currencies, amidst changes in the very nature of citizenship and the construction of identity. These transformations have expressed themselves increasingly in a spirit of deregulation, with its taunting mix of emancipation and limitation. As those citizens not fortunate enough to win the lottery of life try to find salvation in enterprise, they find themselves battling the eccentric currents of the “new” world order, which shortcircuit received sovereignties, received means and ends, received connections between personhood and place. And as the great containers of modern social order have been fractured, so have the cultural, ethical, and spiritual coordinates on which they were founded; coordinates that charted a conceptual and institutional terrain long taken for granted in classic western (for which read Judaeo-Protestant) ideology and its civil extensions: among them, the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, the transcendent and the temporal, the material and the moral, the pious and the pecuniary—and, most of all, modernity and enchantment. Which, by turn, focuses our gaze on occult economies and new religious movements.

Occult Economies and New Religious Movements

A striking corollary of the dawning Age of Millennial Capitalism has been the global proliferation of “occult economies.” These economies have two dimensions: a material aspect founded on the sustained effort to conjure wealth—or to account for its accumulation—by appeal to techniques that defy practical reason; and an ethical aspect, grounded in the moral discourses sparked by the manufacture of value, either real or imagined, by arcane, “magical” means. It is difficult, of course, to quantify the presence of the occult—and, therefore, to make any claim to its increase. As we have already noted, finance capital has always had its spectral enchantments, its modes of speculation based on less than honest toil, on less than rational connections between means and ends. Both its underside (the pariah forms of gambling of which we spoke a moment ago) and its upper side (a fiscal industry, embracing everything from insurance to stock markets) have been rooted, from the first, in two inscrutables: a faith in probability, itself a notoriously poor way of predicting the future from the past, and a monetary system which depends for its existence on “confidence,” a chimera knowable, tautologically, only by its effects. Wherein, then, lies the claim that occult economies are presently on the rise? In the specific context of South Africa, we have demonstrated (1999a) that there has been an explosion of occult-related activity—arising out of accusations of ritual killing, witchcraft, and zombie conjuring—since the late *apartheid* years; also of fantastic Ponzi schemes, of the sale of body parts for “magical” purposes, of allegations of satanic practice, of tourism based on the sighting of fabulous

monsters, and the like. Here middle class magazines run “dial-a-diviner” advertisements, national papers carry headline articles on medicine murders, prime-time television broadcasts dramas of sorcery, and more than one “witchcraft summit” has been held. Whether or not the brute quantum of occult activity exceeds that of times past, it is clear is that their reported incidence, written about by the mainstream press in more prosaic terms than ever before (Fordred, 1999), has forced itself upon the public sphere, rupturing the flow of mediated “news.” It is this rupture—this focus of popular attention on the place of the arcane in everyday production—to which we refer when we speak of a global proliferation of occult economies. It is not difficult to catalogue the presence of these economies in different parts of the planet. In West Africa, for example, Geschiere (1997) has shown how zombie making is an endemic feature of everyday life, how sorcery and witchcraft have entered into postcolonial political economy as an integral element of a thriving vernacular modernity, how magic has become as much an acknowledged aspect of mundane survival strategies as it is indispensable to the ambitions and machinations of the powerful. Nor is all of this based in rural situations or among poor people. In Nigeria’s lively national press, Bastian (1993:133f) shows, witchcraft is a frequent topic, both in quality broadsheets and in tabloids. Far from falling into the domain of the “customary” or the “exotic,” it is a vital idiom for understanding contemporary life—urban and rural, political and personal. One might add, parenthetically, that accounts of Nigerian supernaturalism are frequently recycled in the popular American press, where they have an avid readership, both black and white.

Occult economies thrive in various parts of Asia, too, as Rosalind Morris (2000) indicates. In Thailand—where fortune telling has been transformed by global technology and email divination has taken off—one “traditional” seer, auspiciously named Madam Luk, reports that her clients nowadays ask three questions to the exclusion of all others: Is my company going broke? Am I going to lose my job? and Will I find other employment?¹⁰ Here, as well, the fallout of neoliberal capitalism is having a profound impact on magical practice, a process splendidly captured in Morris’s account of the career of one of Thailand’s most renowned spirit mediums, who recently staged a dramatic, mass-mediated confession: he declared himself a fake. This, no less, so that he might take up a career as a distributor for Amway, a global pyramid scheme run by two Christian patriarchs in a small rural town in Michigan. Such schemes, says Morris, are the economic counterpart of mediumship: they “occult” the production of value with a disarmingly personalized, hyper-real directness. The verb is hers, after Žižek (1997:10); of the point itself, more in a moment.

Sometimes dealings in the occult take on a more visceral, darker form. Throughout Latin America in the 1990s, as in Africa and Asia, there have been mass panics about the clandestine theft and sale of the organs of young people, usually by unscrupulous expatriates (Scheper-Hughes, 1996); violence against children has become metonymic of threats to social reproduction in many ethnic and national contexts, the dead (or missing) child having emerged as the standardized nightmare of a world out of control (J. Comaroff, 1997). There, and in other parts of the globe, this commerce—like international adoptions, mail-order marriage, and indentured domestic labor—is seen as a new form of imperialism, the affluent north siphoning off the essence of poorer “others” by mysterious means for nefarious, often ritual ends. All of which gives evidence, to

those at the nether end of the global distribution of wealth, of the workings of insidious forces, of potent magical technologies and modes of accumulation.

That evidence reaches into the heart of Europe itself: hence the recent scares, in several countries, about the sexual and satanic abuse of children (La Fontaine, 1997); also about the theft and abuse of human tissue and genetic material by an unholy alliance of Godless scientists and corporate Frankensteins. An extreme instance is the urban myth that traversed the internet in 1997 about the secret excision of kidneys, by apparently incredible means, from business travelers waylaid at international airports. Several police departments, moral commentators, and mass media in the USA took these stories seriously enough to investigate them.

Note a persistent theme in all this: the anxiety that has come to surround transformations in the everyday economic world occasioned by two things. The first is by the opening up of new *kinds* of translocal markets, of an inscrutable traffic, in people, labor, services, and things; the second, by the explosion of new forms of financial speculation and investment that are at once seductive and dangerous. If the former is epitomized by the sale of persons and their bodies, part or whole, the latter reaches its apex in the extraordinary intensification, lately, of pyramid schemes, many of them tied to the electronic media. These schemes and a host of scams allied with them—a few legal, many illegal, some alegal—are hardly new. But their recent mushrooming across the world has drawn a great deal of attention; this partly because of their sheer scale and partly because, by crossing national borders and registering at addresses far from the site of their local operation, they insinuate themselves into the slipstream of global capital, thereby escaping control. Recall those whose crash sparked the Albanian revolution early in 1997, several of which took on almost miraculous dimensions for poor investors; one pyramid manager in Albania was “a gypsy fortune teller, complete with crystal ball, who claimed to know the future.”¹¹ Even in the tightly regulated stock markets of the USA, there has been a huge rise in illicit dealings that owe their logic, if not their precise workings, to Ponzi operations; this because investors have become ever more disposed to throw dollars at get-rich-quick schemes. \$6 billion, in fact, was lost to scams on the New York Stock Exchange in 1996.¹² Voodoo economics is alive and well at the financial center of the western world.

These scams also bring to mind others, different yet similar, that arise from a promiscuous mix of scarcity and deregulation; also of enchantment, mystery, even salvation. This was the case with the Foundation for New Era Philanthropy, a US pyramid created “to change the world for the glory of God.” On the basis of a promise to double their money in six months, its founder, John Bennett, persuaded 500 non-profit organizations, Christian colleges, and Ivy League universities to invest \$354 million.¹³ Miracle 2000, a South African “empowerment” scheme that promised a 220% return on investments in 42 days, also had a strongly millennial side to it. So popular did it become that it drew crowds from across the land to the East Rand home of its 39-year-old founder, Sibusiso Radebe, crowds that would wait days to make their deposits. When an elite crime-busting unit of the South African Police Services cracked down on the scheme earlier this year, arresting Radebe, hundreds of outraged investors marched on the Directorate of Public Prosecutions in Pretoria, carrying placards that proclaimed him as their “Messiah.” He was, they said, “doing more to alleviate poverty

than the government.”¹⁴ In something akin to a “memorial service,” these protestors sung hymns and prayed for the return of both their savior and their savings.¹⁵ When Radebe was eventually released on bail, “ululating investors carried [him] shoulder-high and described him as a biblical Moses, who had delivered the downtrodden Israelites to God’s promised land.”¹⁶

All of these things have a single common denominator: the allure of conjuring wealth from nothing. In this respect, while they recall older magicalities, they are the offspring of the same animating spirit as casino capitalism; indeed, perhaps they *are* casino capitalism for those who lack the fiscal or cultural capital—or who, for one or another reason, are reluctant to gamble on more conventional markets. Like the wizardry that made straw into gold (Schneider, 1989), these alchemic techniques defy reason in promising to return unnaturally large profits on small investments, to yield wealth without work, to produce value without effort. Here, again, is the specter, the distinctive spirit, of neoliberalism in its triumphal hour. In its shadowy penumbra, the line between Ponzi schemes and prosperity gospels is very thin indeed.

Which brings us to the spread of new religious movements across the planet. These, we suggest, may be seen as the apotheosis of the occult economies of which we have been speaking; as their holy-owned subsidiaries, if we may be forgiven the pun. Such movements take on a wide variety of guises. Some, like the Vissariontsi with which we began, sound perennial themes of apocalypse and utopian communitarianism, albeit tuned to a distinctively local key. But the followers of Vissarion also share a good deal with other Neoprotestant denominations elsewhere, among them the New Life Church in South Africa: the tendency to view congregations as joint stock companies, offering the faithful a tangible return on their investments; a fascination with new technologies and media that seem to condense the numinous magic of global enterprise; an eclipse of the ideal of patient toil and paradise postponed by the promise of prompt reward; the fusing of a millennial spirit with the speculative force of finance capital, so that the instant accumulation of wealth becomes synonymous with the unmediated power of God; a tendency, because of all this, to be viewed by orthodox believers as being mercenary, Satanic, magic-ridden.

These features are even more palpable in the so-called “fee-for-service” faiths, those consumer cults alluded to above, which are challenging established Christian denominations in Africa and elsewhere. Typical of them is the Brazilian movement, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (*Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*), which, since 1994, has grown rapidly all over southern Africa. Controversial in its country of origin, this church is reforming the Protestant Ethic with enterprise and urbanity. It owns a major television network in Brazil, has an elaborate website, and sponsors high-profile religious rock groups and soap operas (Kramer, 1999). Above all, it promises swift payback to those who embrace Christ, denounce Satan, and “make their faith practical” by “sacrificing” all they can to the movement.¹⁷ Here Pentecostalism meets neoliberal enterprise head on; here the theological waxes psychotherapeutic. In its African churches, most of them—literally—storefronts in town centers, prayer meetings respond to candidly mercenary motives, offering everything from cures for depression through financial advice to remedies for unemployment; itinerant passers-by, clients and customers really, select the services they require. Even the smallest churches

have elaborate electronic sound systems; pounding music, indistinguishable from any other rock music to all but the best trained ear, beats out a distinctly this-worldly ethos. A collage of advertisements for BMWs and lottery winnings adorns the altar in one such church, beneath the heading: "Delight Yourself in the Lord and He Will Give You the Desires of Your Heart (Psalms 37:4)." Tabloids stuck to walls and windows carry stories, told in the first person, about those whose rebirth in the fold was rewarded by a rush of wealth or an astonishing recovery of health.

The ability to deliver in the here-and-now, itself a potent form of space-time compression, is offered as the measure of a genuinely global God, just as it is taken to explain the lively power of satanism; both have the instant efficacy of the magical and the millennial. As Kramer (1999:35) says of Brazilian Neopentecostals, "innerworldly asceticism has been replaced with a concern for the pragmatics of material gain and the immediacy of desire . . . [T]he return on capital has suddenly become more spiritually compelling and imminent . . . than the return of Christ." This shift is endemic to many new religious movements at the end of the twentieth century. For them, and for their many millions of members, the Second Coming evokes not a Jesus who saves, but one who pays dividends. Or, more accurately, one who promises a miraculous return on spiritual venture capital.

It might be argued that, as neoliberal forces have eroded the provenance of liberal democratic states in respect of education, health and welfare, religious movements, above all, those flexible "prosperity" movements that mimic the workings of business, have expanded their institutional reach into formerly "secular" public domains. In South Africa, as a rising sense of entitlement runs up against the reality of privatization and dwindling state resources, churches have invested ever more heavily in building schools, clinics, and sports centers. They have extended their ministry in time and content, offering a host of individualized, special services—from exorcism to book-keeping—to members and nonmembers alike. Ever more aware of their role in "civil society," these denominations involve themselves actively in current politics, both local and national. As a consequence, notions of the sacred and profane, of membership and congregation, of the calendar and of the institutional scope of organized religion, are all being radically reshaped. So, too, are the means of mediating and manifesting divine power.

Why? How—to put the matter more generally—are we to account for the current spread and impact of occult economies and prosperity cults? In framing the problem, of course, we have already pointed in the direction of some answers.

Toward a Privatized Millennium

To the degree that millennial capitalism fuses the modern and the postmodern, hope and hopelessness, utility and futility, the world created in its image presents itself as a mass of contradictions: as a world, simultaneously, of possibility and impossibility. This is precisely the juxtaposition associated with cargo cults and chiliastic movements in other times and places (Worsley, 1957; Cohn, 1957). But, as the growth of prosperity gospels and fee-for-service movements illustrates, in a neoliberal age the chiliastic urge

emphasizes a privatized millennium, a personalized rather than a communal sense of rebirth. In this, the messianic meets the magical. At the end of the twentieth century, the cargo, glimpsed in large part through TV, takes the form of huge concentrations of wealth accruing, legitimately or otherwise, to the rich of the new planetary economy. It is enigmatic wealth, derived mysteriously, as we said earlier, from financial investment and management, from intellectual property and other rights, from electronics and cyberspace, from transport and its cognate operations, and from the supply of various sorts of post-Fordist services. All of which points to the fact that the covert mechanisms of a changing market, not to mention abstruse technological and informational expertise, hold the key to hitherto unimaginable fortunes; to capital amassed by the ever more rapid flow of value, across time and space, into the fluid coordinates of the local and the global.

Herein, of course, lies the other side of the coin: the sense of impossibility, even despair that comes from being left out of the promise of prosperity; from having to look in on a global economy of desire from its immiserated exteriors. Whether it be in post-Soviet Central Europe or postcolonial Africa, in post-Thatcherite Britain or the neoliberal USA, in a China rushing toward capitalism or in Neopentecostal Latin America, the world-historical process which came to be symbolized by the events of 1989 held out the prospect that everyone would be set free to accumulate and speculate, to consume, and to indulge repressed cravings in a universe of less government, greater privatization, more opulence, and infinite enterprise. For the vast majority, however, the millennial moment passed without visible enrichment.

The implication? That, in these times—the late modernist age when, according to Weber and Marx, enchantment would wither away—more and more ordinary people see arcane forces intervening in the production of value, diverting its flow toward a new elect. They also attribute to these arcane forces their feelings of erasure and loss: an erasure, in many places, of community and family; a loss of human integrity, experienced in the spreading commodification of persons and their bodies, in the unyoking of the market value from the social value of objects and relations, in the substitution of quantities for quality, abstraction for substance. None of these perceptions is new, as we have said. Balzac (1965 [1847]) described them for France in the 1840s, as did Conrad (1957 [1911]) for prerevolutionary Russia, and neither were alone; Gluckman (1959) spoke of the “magic of despair” which arose in similarly dislocated colonial situations in Africa.

Nonetheless, to reiterate, such disruptions are widely *experienced* throughout the world as intensifying at a frightening rate at present. Which is why the ethical dimensions of occult economies are so prominent; why the mass panics of our times tend to be moral in tone; why they so often express themselves in religious movements, movements that pursue instant material returns and yet condemn those who enrich themselves in unGodly ways; why, more generally, occult economies consist, at one level, in the constant quest for new, magical means for otherwise unattainable ends, and yet, at another, voice a desire to sanction, even eradicate, people held to have accumulated assets by those very means. Satan and salvation, it seems, remain the conditions of each other's imaginings.

In sum, occult economies in general, and Neoprotestant religious movements in particular—in Africa and elsewhere—are a response to the perception of an epochal shift in the constitution of the lived world: a world in which the most promising way to create real wealth seems to lie in forms of power/knowledge that transgress the conventional, the rational, the moral—thus to multiply available techniques of producing value, fair or foul. In their cultural aspect, these economies bespeak a resolute effort to come to terms with that power/knowledge, to account for the inexplicable phenomena to which it gives rise, to plumb its secrets—a byproduct of which is the invention of new realist specters. Thus, for example, the unprecedented manifestation of zombies in some parts of the South African countryside has grown in direct proportion to the shrinking labor market for young men (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999b). The former provide a partial explanation for the latter: the living dead are commonly said to be killed and raised up by older people, by witches of wealth, to toil for them, thereby rendering rural youth jobless. There are, in this era of flexitime employment, even part-time zombies, a virtual working class—of pure, abstract labor power—that slaves away at night for its masters. In this context, moreover, the angry dramas through which ritual murderers are identified often become sites of public divination. As they unfold, the accusers discuss, attribute cause, and speak out their understanding of the forces that make the postcolony such an inhospitable place for them. This is an extreme situation, obviously. But in less stark circumstances, too, changing moral and material economies tend to spawn simultaneous strivings to garner wealth *and* to make transparent the means by which that wealth may be produced.

As all this suggests, appeals to the occult in pursuit of the secrets of capital generally rely on local cultural technologies: on vernacular modes of divination or oracular consultation, on spirit possession or ancestral invocation, on sorcery busting or forensic legal procedures, on witch beliefs or prayer. Whatever. We stress, though, that the use of these technologies does not imply an iteration of, a retreat into, “tradition.” *Per contra*, their deployment in such circumstances is frequently a means of fashioning new techniques to preserve older values, of retooling culturally familiar signs and practices. As in cargo cults of old, this typically involves the mimicking of powerful new means of producing wealth (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993:xvf).

The rise of occult economies—amidst and alongside more conventional modes of economic practice, shading into the murky domains of crime and corruption—seems overdetermined at the start of the twenty-first century. This, after all, is an age in which the extravagant optimism of millennial capitalism runs up against an increasingly nihilistic, thoroughly postmodern, pessimism. As the connections between means and ends grow more opaque, the occult becomes an ever more semantically saturated metaphor for our times. Note how commonplace it is nowadays to pepper media-parlance, science-speak, new age psychobabble, and technogese—even the law¹⁸ with the language of enchantment. But, we insist, occult economies are not reducible to the symbolic, the figurative, or the allegorical alone. Magic is, everywhere, the science of the concrete, aimed at making sense of and acting upon the world—especially, but not only, among those who feel themselves disempowered, emasculated, disadvantaged. The fact that the turn to enchantment is not unprecedented, that it has precursors in

earlier times, makes it no less significant to those for whom it has become an integral part of everyday reality. Maybe, too, all this describes a fleeting phase in the long, unfinished history of capitalism. But that makes it no less momentous. Especially in the white heat of the millennial moment.

Toward a Beginning

However we wish to characterize this Uncommon Age—as an epoch of death (of ideology, politics, the subject) or rebirth (of the spirit of Marx, Weber, the Adams, Ferguson and Smith)—ours are perplexing times; times caught uneasily between Derrida's "end of work" (n.d.; see above) and Žižek's (1997) "plague of fantasies;" times in which the conjuncture of the strange and the familiar, of stasis and metamorphosis, plays tricks on our perceptions, our positions, our praxis. This conjuncture appears at once to endorse and to erode our understanding of the lineaments of modernity. And its postponements. Here, plainly, we have tried to do no more than offer some preliminary observations about the passage from the apocalyptic perplexities of the present to the mundane realities of the future, interrogating, with due respect to Max Weber, the elective affinity between the spirit of a rising millennial capitalism, the occult economies which are growing up in its penumbra, and those Neoprotestant religious movements that give voice to its ethos.

As we all know, the inscription of materiality in moral economy, of the pursuit of this-worldly wealth in otherworldly religious faith, is hardly new. In the Protestant Ethic, Weber (1958:175) himself italicizes a passage from John Wesley that says: "we must exhort all Christians to gain all they can, and to save all they can; that is, in effect, to grow rich." What, then, is new? We have suggested that the answer lies in an historically concrete conjuncture. One side of that conjuncture is a postmodern, postindustrial, salvific form of capitalism, a capitalism that no longer waits for the messiah—with due respect to Vissarion—but acts like one. It is a form of capitalism that is experienced, to invoke Marx's *camera obscura*, upside down; that appears to have done away with production, and productive labor, as its fundamental source of property, personhood, family, identity, community, moral order, even "society"; that has altered the sovereignty of the nation-state and displaced its traditional public institutions; that has reconstituted space and time, expanding their virtual and global coordinates; that has elevated consumption into a prime mover, into the foundation of being in the world, into an epistemic act that makes the legal, psychotherapeutic, self-contracting individual of the "new" world order into a stakeholder, itself a trope that fuses gambling with corporate citizenship.

On the other side of the conjuncture is the religion of the Vissariontsi in Siberia, of the New Life Church in South Africa, of those Disciples of Christ in Indiana, and many others besides. It is a religion of free choice and a flexible architecture, of instant materialities and dealmaking with the divine, of radically voluntarist subjects and repressed memories, of mass-mediations, global imaginings, and enchanted investments. Old time religion, it seems, is, at least in its Neoprotestant manifestation, being compressed into space-time religion. Thus it is that, as the past becomes the future, new spiritual

movements, especially in African postcolonies, seek to harness the numinous magic of global enterprise, to fuse a messianic spirit with the speculative force of finance capital, thereby “taking the waiting out of wanting,” thereby separating salvation from saving and/or this-worldly ascetism. This is not to say that the old Protestantism is dead and gone. Quite the contrary: there are many contexts in which it is putting up animated resistance, where the first incarnation of Max Weber is alive and well. However, a Second Coming seems imminent in more and more places across the planet. It is a Second Coming that heralds a new Protestant Ethic, a new Spirit of Capitalism, and a new historical anthropology to make sense of both.

“Second Comings: Neoprotestant Ethics and Millennial Capitalism” appeared in *2000 Years: Faith, Culture, and Identity in the Common Era*, edited by Nigel Rapport. It was first given as a lecture, in a series with the same title, at St. Andrews University, Scotland, in November 2000. Some of the ideas developed here, along with the empirical examples required to illustrate them, were first aired in other essays, among them “Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction” (1999a), “Alien-nation: Zombies, Immigrants, and Millennial Capitalism” (1999b), and “Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming” (2000); a few passages included above are also taken from those essays, although they are deployed to rather different ends. We should like to express our appreciation to Nigel Rapport, whose invitation to present this lecture prompted us to write it in the first place.

Notes

- 1 See <http://www.vissarion-unifaith.net>. The phrases quoted in this paragraph are to be found in two places: the first, from the home page, by clicking on <English>, then On <A Little Grain of Sand> then on <Contents>, and finally on <Epilogue>; the second, directly from the home page on to <Information Letter>. Vissarion has other linked sites as well, among them one in the U. S.A. (www.vissarion.com) and another in Russia (www.vissarion.ru).
- 2 “Messiah on the make in Sun City,” Tom Whitehouse, *The Observer World*, 30 May 1999, p. 26. A documentary, made by Andrei Zhigalov, was screened by BBC2 as part of its series *Return to Wonderland* in 1999.
- 3 The mural, “Paid Programming” by Jeffrey Zimmerman, is to be found, at the time of writing, on Honore Street at North Avenue. It has been reproduced in *Public Culture*, 12(2) (2000:348–9).
- 4 “Hooked on gambling,” George F. Will, *Herald Tribune*, 26–27 June 1999, p. 8.
- 5 “Capital gains: the lottery on lives,” Jane Bryant Quinn, *Newsweek*, 15 March 1999, p. 55.
- 6 Viaticals are policies bought from the terminally ill, especially those in the late stages of AIDS.
- 7 “Lottery mania grips Madhya Pradesh, many commit suicide,” *Indian Tribune* (Chicago), 23(1), 2 January 1999, p. 8.
- 8 “Compulsion to gamble seen growing,” Bret Pulley, *New York Times*, December 26–27, p. 22.
- 9 “Hooked on gambling: other comment,” George F. Will, *Herald Tribune*, 26–27 June 1999, p. 8.

- 10 "Letter from Bangkok: Thai seers dealt reversal of fortune," Uli Schmetzer, *Chicago Tribune*, 18 November 1997, p. 4.
- 11 See e.g. "Albanian parties trade charges in the pyramid scandal," Celestine Bohlen, and "Behind the scams: Desperate People, Easily Duped," Edmund L. Andrews, *New York Times*, 27 January 1997, p. 3.
- 12 See "Investment fraud is soaring along with the stock market," Leslie Eaton, *New York Times*, 30 November 1997, pp. 1, 24.
- 13 "Charity Pyramid Schemer sentenced to 12 years," *Chicago Tribune*, 23 September 1997, p. 6.
- 14 African Press Association; published on the Web by IOL on 7/13/2000 (<http://www.iol.co.za/generallnewsprint.php3?art id=qw963495900872B265>)
- 15 "Fury as Cash 'Miracle' Turns to Dust," Selby Bokaba and Vivian Warby, *The Star (Johannesburg)*; published on the Web by IOL on 7/13/2000.
- 16 "Hero's Welcome for Miracle 2000 Mastermind," Selby Bokaba, *The Star (Johannesburg)*; published on the Web by IOL on 7/13/2000 (<http://www.iol.co.za/generallnewsprint.php3?>).
- 17 The phrases in quotes were uttered by a Universal Church pastor in Mafikeng, South Africa, in 2000, where the denomination is growing fast: it has two storefront chapels, several rural centers, and a much watched program on the local TV channel.
- 18 We were struck by one recent instance, since it resonates so obviously with our concerns here: Michael Metelits, speaking of labor legislation in the "new" South Africa, referred to it as a "tricky, not to say occult business." See "Toiling masses and honest capitalists," Michael Metelits, "Work to Rule: A Focus on Labour Legislation," supplement to *Mail and Guardian*, 15–21 October 1999, p. 11.

CHAPTER 4

Divination in Africa

René Devisch

There is a growing historical and comparative research into the millennia-old institution of geomantic and shamanic divination. Its worldwide dissemination from Paleolithic time across and beyond Asia and Africa counts as one of the oldest forms of proto-globalization. Major threads of the global cultural history of divination are explored in the study edited by Wim van Binsbergen (2011). Today, as documented in the study edited by Axel Langer and Albert Lutz (1999), divination surfaces in its different local forms in many parts of the world.

Prejudicial denigration of divination in the twentieth century was the work of reformist modernity in the west and its colonial mind-set. Indeed, Enlightenment rationality has sharply confined the scope of science or valid knowledge practice to tangible and objective evidence within a materialistic and mechanistic worldview. In both the concomitant modernist mirror of progress and the late nineteenth century Christian missionary creed, divination has been ethnocentrically characterized as an animistic system of beliefs and irrational search of meaning being deeply, albeit mistakenly, entrenched in some collective imaginary of vindictive spirits, ancestors, sorcery. In this vein, the divinatory oracle and subsequent family palaver were viewed as a highly imaginary resort of mental health and social ethics, and/or as a mere incentive to inter-subjective conflict resolution and communitarian pacification concordantly in the human and extrahuman worlds.

The present study seeks to overcome the modernist ethnocentric prejudices in relation to the institution of divination. It develops as a follow-up to an earlier overview article shedding light into major anthropological approaches to divination in Black Africa (Devisch, 1985). My study has no intention to reduce geomantic or shamanic divination's multi-levelled and keen perceptiveness to any so-called mode of mystical or paranormal scrutiny. To be sure, the chief purpose here is to articulate the view that, seen in its own terms, divination is a process involving complex—bodily, affect-laden, sensory, mediumnic, artistic—folds and skills of human consciousness. The burden of

the argument will be that whilst delving into some sealed layers of consciousness of the client and consultants, divination moreover explores the unthought-in-thought, the unspeakable or undisclosable in the client's history and/or that of the family. In other words, divination is fundamentally a quest into the unrepresentable or unspeakable which lies buried in one's shadowy side or unconscious otherness of self. It likewise embraces some unguessed fate in the transgenerational and inter-world interconnectivity.

Diviners in Africa, whether female or male, are perceived by their communities as mediums of spiritual "forces". As people perceive it, the latter loom beyond the reach of mere visually inquired "factual" knowledge, yet dawn through their repeatable dramatic force-effects on the diviner's body and senses, dreams and state of trance, or through a sudden change of the client's health or capacities. Indeed, in the terms of Brian Massumi (2002:160), "A "force" is the set of invisible, untouchable, self-renewing conditions according to which certain effects can habitually be expected to appear". And the forces driving the divinatory oracle moreover manifest in the inter- and intrasubjectively compelling effect of the oracular utterances on the consultants.

In an effort to initiate a fresh approach that is borderlinking Western-derived human sciences and local knowledge systems and practices, the present study *first* provides a comparative and broad historical overview of major kinds of divination in Africa. *Second*, it will assess recent experiential cognitive approaches to divination defined as local forms of knowledge production in the borderspace of affliction and hope, angst and responsible commitment. In addition, recent phenomenological views of divination approach it as praxis and experience of relationality and increasingly of intercultural knowledge sharing. *Third*, I will concentrate on the initiation and oracular scrutiny characterising the mediumnic Yaka diviner in southwestern DR Congo insofar as such practice grants the diviner-to-be a self-lucidly standing in the matrixial realm of forces, in search of visionary dis-occultation. *Fourth*, the study will round off by systematising the approach regarding the bodiliness of perception of an inter-subjective and transworld resonance. It is one that endorses a perspectival approach in lines with Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the body-subject and his plural perspectivism of perception. The latter finds a powerful complement in the matrixial feel-thinking devised by Bracha Ettinger.

Comparative and Historical Overview of Divination Forms

Divination addresses the consultants' longing for some *connaissance* or comprehending of the basic propensity of the things of life in their lifeworld. Divination—as I have learned to know it particularly in South-Saharan Africa—rests on the widely shared assumption of an *inter-connectedness between worlds*. The diviner testifies to the perspicacious insight that the mere perceptible or tangible worlds—sky, earth, underworld, and the relevant social and bodily realms—are each in its own modus, pervaded by interdependent and inter-informed, invisible or intangible forces. These are figured as ancestral shades, spirits, witchcraft or sorcery, that affect the lives of the living. With regard to this interconnectedness, fully initiated and respected diviners are viewed as

capable of authoritatively disclosing the client's predicament. Some practitioners are predestined for this role at birth, others are identified as fit for it on the basis of their witty perceptiveness and of their exceptional recovery from a disabling state of possession hinging on some family trauma. Through an arduous process of initiation and sophisticated professional training, diviners come to embody and foster elaborate divinatory skills. Notwithstanding their common initiation into one or another inter-regional cult or sodality of divination, diviners tend to operate separately.

I contend that divination basically addresses the consultants' shared desire and situated perception, rather than fact-based and responsible use of verbalised cognition, in their exchange with relevant others, all the while sustaining an ethic of desire. Divinatory art is brought to play mainly in cases of existential crisis. This may be due to chronic illness, threat of death, misfortune, witchcraft, hopeless love life, shortage of resources, difficulties with one's enterprise, unfortunate journey, insoluble conflict, or natural calamity.

At the consultation, *geomantic* divination examines oracular signs through an at random exploration of their *signifiante* or signifiers that gropingly interconnect with the case at hand. It is up to the diviner's keen perceptiveness to lay bare the traces, and spell out the interconnection, of the actions, contexts, tendencies or blockages that qualify the problem submitted. Geomantic divination deploys a basket, tray, ladle or cup, marked tablets or a geometrical design on the ground, floor or mat. The configurations of icons, often called the "divination bones" or "oracular tokens," when properly tossed or thrown, are to be decoded as articulation points of the client's predicament. Or the oracular signs may be peculiar traces left on a particular spot of land by some totemic animal—a gazelle, fowl, mouse, chameleon. The Mancala board games—a widespread form of geomancy in Africa—operate with a fixed number of pebbles, cowry-shells or seeds, being repeatedly redistributed over a number of holes in two to four rows. The *sangoma* tablet divination in southern Africa (van Binsbergen, 2003: ch. 7) interprets the tossed handfuls of "bones"—namely, a dozen or more sacred icons. Originally mirroring the fate and biographical markers of diviner-to-be as revealed in her dreams, they offer a grid to interpret the ills of the client and/or her or his kin-group. The diviner's decoding of the patterns of oracular signs seeks to discern, often in dialogue with the consultant, the auspicious versus fatal propensities of the client's condition and lifeworld. The diviner thereby develops her scant decoding in an interplay of past with present events, action and reaction, passivity and activity, and of the bodily, social, and cosmological fields. The oracle may in particular tune in with the client's health, dispositions, and auspicious and inauspicious web of vital social relations, in as much as these are exposed to the predicaments of a postcolonial globalizing world (with displacements, financial risks, job insecurity), or to witchcraft or sorcery, the deceased, ancestors, or spirits.

Shamanic-like *mediumnic* divination engages the practitioner's innate and/or initiatory capacities of affective, oneiric, intuitive, acute bodily-sensory, or synaesthetic perceptiveness. It entails a subtle intercorporeal, introceptive, and mental attunement to, and inter-subjective and inter-world "com-position" with, the client, relevant others, the spirit realm, the propensity of the things of life in the various worlds. It is a resonance and interference at dynamic thresholds, figuring as the work of spirits, ancestors, witchcraft or sorcery.

Scholars have distinguished three types of shamanic divination, depending on whether it is produced by possession-trance, by strict shamanic trance, or by a trance-like or heightened state of consciousness. The first type is widespread and is mediumnic, involving trance-possession of the diviner who relays or even acts out the message sent by the possessing spirit or deity. Spirit mediums may be associated with a shrine of an inter-regional cult, such as Mwali in southeast Africa or Ngombo (spread across the Congo-Lunda belt in the southwest of the DR Congo, southeast Angola, and northwest Zambia). The second type comprises the shamanic diviner who initiates visionary contact with the spirit. She then either recounts the visionary journey or transduces the actions of the spirit in her body through a particular alteration in her sensory capacities. It could be argued that this type of divination is being reappropriated, in multiethnic urban and peri-urban contexts throughout Africa, by many neo-Pentecostal and akin Christian-style charismatic movements of the Holy Spirit. While speaking in the name of the Holy Spirit, Christian diviner-prophets surreptitiously coalesce this Christian divine figure with the ancestral spirits (though often overtly diabolized), summoned to participate in the healing process of the most afflicted church members (Devisch, 1996). The shifting or hybridizing power of the Holy Spirit-Ancestor is all the more effective by virtue of its encompassing capacity to animate, re-energize and recapture life forces in the adepts' various fields of belonging that were very much detracted, hence denigrated, by the shock of civilizations. That the divining art of these prophets tends to slide into moral prophecy focusing on individual strivings demonstrates the extent to which the perception and explanation of misfortune and divinatory practice increasingly reflect a spirit of individual entrepreneurship that is spurred by the multiethnic and commoditized urban context. The third type of divination is distinct in that diviners or seers here develop heightened sensorial and dreamlike visionary capacities—as we will concentrate on, below.

In shamanic and shamanic-like mediumnic divination, the attunement that the oracular scrutiny seeks into the case and its relevant lifeworld is concretely elaborated with the help of an etiological grid of questions which progressively unfolds into some elucidation of the client's plight. The hermeneutics entail a tentative double reflection: one that concerns the client's fate, and another that spells this out by way of bringing out an auspicious or ominous resemblance with the more encompassing condition of familiar things, place and being. It may unfold a resemblance in the visible realm here and now, and one vaguely in tune with the other-worldly, or rather "inter-worldly"—a notion that I will re-examine in the section on the perspectival approach, below. In other words, both mediumnic and geomantic divination implies an otherwise unattainable but authoritative, culture-specific comprehending of some transworld, inter-subjective and inter-corporeal design or propensity regarding both life-threatening illness, misfortune, adversity or existential uncertainty, and the concerned subject's resistance, redress or recovery.

From the late 1990s, in-depth interregional and historical comparative studies led to new perceptions of divination as hermeneutics, un-concealing its regenerative process of world-making out of the client's plight. Former approaches had been stymied by the modernist and positivist preoccupation with whether divination provides valid knowledge of reality in the form of factual or evidential propositions. Van Binsbergen

et al. (2011) explore the global cultural history of geomancy and shamanism from the earliest developments in a Neolithic context of animal husbandry, agriculture, hunting, side by side with Paleolithic beginnings of astronomy and the earth cult. These developments in the millennia-old civilizations of ancient Egypt and the ancient Near East were cross-fertilized by incipient forms of proto-science in the Indus valley and ancient China. The later development and spread of divinatory, particularly geomantic, practices went hand in hand with upcoming techniques of increasing formalization and control of society, in pace with the conceptualization of the propensity of things in the universe. One thinks here of the intricate developments of kingship, state, priesthood, proto-science and writing, next to the inter-regional spread of implements of chance, all divinatory in origin, such as board games, chess, and fortune-telling. Geomantic divination later developed into a central feature of Islamic high civilization, and extended beyond Islam both along the Indian ocean and the coasts of Byzantium, to the Latin West, and across most of Africa and Madagascar, and—via the trans-Atlantic slave trade—around the Caribbean and on the Latin-American west coast. Most widespread geomantic techniques attested since 500 years B.P. in Islamic West Africa are the cowrie-shell and dream divination (Devisch, 2007).

Recent Cognitive and Phenomenological Approaches

The present follow-up will examine how much, since the 1990s, the scholarly appraisal of divination entails a shift to subtle experiential-cognitive or culture-sensitive phenomenological interpretations. I will argue that some of these experiential approaches contribute to both a focus on local “Bantu” epistemologies, and an attempt at the clearing of divinatory practices in their own terms. These studies add to a borderlinking of western-born human sciences and local knowledge systems and practices. They echo the program towards a revalorization of the local cultures’ genius, as it has successively been called for by ethnosciences, the militant *Négritude* movement, the plural versions of Afro-modernity, and in particular the academic concern, as launched in particular at South African Universities, for a dialogue with the local or “indigenous knowledge systems” (IKS).

The Diviner as a Local Master of Knowledge: Recent Cognitive Approaches

A systemic and experiential cognitive approach to possession and divination in west Africa and the Indian Ocean is offered by Marie-Claude Dupré and co-authors (Dupré, 2001). These studies suggest that, in today’s context of intrusive inter-civilizational contact, ancestors and deities do remain part of people’s existence. Ancestors and spirits form the horizon of the subject’s experience of, and meaning-making, regarding insistent dreams, possession, affliction, like other most basic pulsations and anxieties. Side by side to the recent neo-Pentecostal devotion to the revelations of the Holy Spirit, divination’s ethic of desire helps people, exposed to overwhelming alterity or otherness, to articulate their search towards reinforcing their identity and sense of security and

fulfillment. Subjects experience alterity as all the more unsettling when they are exposed to alien civilizations and new techniques (of production, healing, initiation), which may add to existence's fundamental indeterminacy.

That trance-possession may have a functional role in locally re-assessing processes of social cohesion, personal and collective identity building, political legitimation, and the transmission of specialist healing techniques, has been demonstrated by diachronic studies of a structuro-functionalist scope. Moreover, possession cults may frame historical consciousness and reflective techniques for screening and maintaining vital ecological resources placed under the guardianship of lineage or cult spirits. Or they may underscore modalities of shaping and arbitrating gender or lineage relations tied to the moral economy of hereditary afflictions. It is along the lines of this rationalization of the experience and management of beliefs that the cognitive hypothesis has come to the fore.

According to Dupré's experiential-cognitive hypothesis, the possessing spirit is not an unsubstantial entity along the lines of a ghost, demon, shade, or ancestor, operating in the beliefs structure of the supernatural. The possessing agency, so to say, is a cognitive and meaning-making dynamic and "uniquely human capacity to create the symbolic, that is to say, to give meaning to the lived situation" (Dupré, 2002:14, my translation). Thus, rejecting the spirit hypothesis, Dupré depicts the diviner as a "master of systemic knowledge" with regard to more or less primordial energy fields at play in fecundity, sociality, and the cosmos, and in everyday life summoned by rhythms, song, dance, and trance. In her familiar world, the diviner is also the authoritative interpreter with regard to the client's transworldly destiny, the ungraspable otherness in the unfathomable turbulence of self or the unspeakable wounds of civilisational intrusion—much of these being popularly associated with the bearings of spirits or witchcraft and sorcery.

Knut Myhre (2006a, 2006b, 2007), in his well-informed approach to both divination and reproductive flows among the Chagga of Kilimanjaro Rombo District in northeastern Tanzania, offers a pragmatic blend of a cognitive perspective cast in the language of the Wittgenstein's *Philosophical investigations*. (In the section dealing with perspectival ontology, below, I will distance myself from Myhre's reductionism.) Addressing the practical and contextual use of language and the instrumental rationality of objects used, he treats divination as a skilled expression of Chagga grammar and mental terms and as "a form of enquiry that constitutes knowledge about the world" (Myhre, 2006a:313). His analysis follows the functioning of concepts in the locally shared pragmatic or conventional language use, and the way oracular statements in the divinatory process disclose their own rules and thereby offer justification for their own truth-claims. The researcher's attention moves on to the grammar of language capacities and the language games that are attuned with both the locally shared bodily practices and the pragmatic manipulation of physical objects and techniques, as well as with the social rules and habitual practical modes of being in society. Anthropological analysis, that is to say, can profitably focus on the grammatical, lexical, and dialogical development of the divinatory pragmatic narratives and oracular truth claims. These are seen as contextually expressed forms of linguistic representation, language game and contextual expression, as well as a potential mode for the re-orientation of Chagga local subjectivities and forms of life.

Myhre regards suspiciously any approach to divination that would conceptualize the relationship between the oracular statements and their practical use as being one of reference, namely as “statements that ‘really’ mean something else than they appear to” (2006b:19); one thinks of underlying processes or a “hidden state of affairs” which the oracular verdict would seek to control or unravel. He argues that divination is neither to be understood as a purposeful and innovative production of meaning nor as a pretension to truth or form of decision-making reaching beyond its own pragmatics and based in one’s access—however linguistically unwarranted—to a non-normal mode of cognition regarding a problematic invisible or other-worldly reality. Inasmuch as the Chagga diviner does not hint, either linguistically or practically, at any invisible agency or mediumnic capacity, explanatory analysis and thematization should restrict itself to the practical and the this-worldly context-bound ways of doing and guiding things through the specific wordings employed and their social, practical, usage.

Divination and Transcultural Knowledge Sharing: Phenomenological Views

Several scholars bring in their personal experience of acute sensorial or dreamlike visionary contact with the spirit world (Edith Turner, 1992; Roy Willis, 1999), particularly in the context of their initiatory experience as spirit-medium and diviner (van Binsbergen, 2003; Jo Wreford, 2008). A key question is whether this personal experience of the researcher can bring insight into both the unfathomable liminoid state of spirit possession. Does it further our understanding of the acute shamanic discernment beyond the visible and tangible world? Does this personal or initiatory experience, one might ask, enrich our reflection on inter-cultural questions of experiential-phenomenology and epistemology? This fundamental question has many ramifications and leads to a host of other questions. In which way does a close study of divinatory disclosure and the consultants’ proclivity to be absorbed by it contribute to the decolonization of the anthropological research endeavor? In other words, can the anthropological encounter at the very heart of a socio-culture develop a truly horizontal reciprocity? Does witnessing the host group’s genuine interaction with spirit possession and subsequent healing spur the anthropologist towards a self-critical comprehension of the local worldview and spiritual practices or religious impulse, in both their marvellous and murky layers, in their own terms? And does such comprehension of these most intimate institutions and people’s absorption in their very terms and intentionality not predispose the researcher to become a local believer or practitioner, as implied in publications by Paul Stoller, Michael Jackson and Wim van Binsbergen?

Or should we understand this decolonization of the research agenda as a shift, from the position of researcher-witness with regard to a given local community’s cultural genius, to a mediating role on the part of the anthropologist? Is the anthropologist witnessing to the culturally induced transformation of subjects from religious imagination to religious perception and expert believers? Is she or he to become a vicarious receptacle of cultural resources and spiritual wisdom, yet also of opaque layers, of humankind? And is such a shift not presaging a mode of transcultural science-sharing in academia or cyberspace, if not a mutual enrichment and perhaps a gradual fusion of knowledge forms worldwide?

The competent work of today's respected diviners or shamans is indeed a millennia-old art of disclosing and borderlinking worlds, namely this-worldly and inter- or trans-worldly invisible, unfathomable and unthought ones. It indeed witnesses to a post-apartheid or a post-colonial, open-minded and inter-cultural encounter and mode of knowledge-sharing within and across North and South. It is a sharing both in line and at odds with the ongoing processes of informational globalization and of the economic exclusion of the many peripheral societies. Numerous African and non-African, autochthonous and allochthonous mediumnic diviners, who are initiated in an African or a pre-Christian European divinatory art, work in the South or the North with clients from diverse cultural horizons. They particularly bear witness to a very rich variety of modes of divinatory mobilization of shared insight and desire, situational enhancement of symbolic and ethical systems, and ways of subject formation aside the Enlightenment ratio and ethos. These practitioners forcefully invite us to rethink our western-centric and by definition limited and biasing modes of understanding energy and matter, reality and representation, body and mind, meaning and agency, attachment and belonging, culture and power, and the potency of place and time horizons of selfhood.

Does the anthropological study of the vitality and essence of divinatory mediumship—with its rich local modalities and as one of the oldest and most globally-known forms of dis-occultation of existential crisis—not make the anthropologist a witness to a deep-rooted and resilient art? It is one that however remains in the margins of public attention in today's neo-colonial contexts of identity struggle and materialist objectives. To be sure, divinatory elucidation in tune with an ethic of desire can hardly flourish in lifeworlds predominantly geared towards objectification, measurement, radical individualism, and hedonist consumerism.

Departing from a mere cognitive emphasis on non-linguistic representation, language games and analytical thought, recent approaches to divinatory practice seek to interpret such experiential reality in a more phenomenological manner. How does its hermeneutics authoritatively carry away the consultants into a proclivity to adhere? Which making of selfhood and ethical space does it consider and sustain in the fields of acts, desires, and intentions struck by the crisis or misfortune now submitted to the oracle?

Koen Stroeken (2004, 2010)—an anthropologist at Ghent University—very convincingly argues that Sukuma divination in northwest Tanzania reaches into the subcultural “real” of sheer being and matter, namely the realm of a non-negotiable given or unconstructed kernel at the heart of human experience. It is a kernel beneath or beyond sheer appearance, semblance, “imaginarisation,” symbolization or language games. Sukuma divination assumes that reality, like the subject's experience and inner landscape, is at heart not something constructed but something found in and emerging from the ancestral realm that is “out there.” The diviner is meant to be receptive to the “real” dimension of practice, that is the ancestral or spirit source of the life course shared by the descendants and in particular of whatever befalls the consulting individual. The entranced diviner is by definition considered as having a more disclosing comprehension of these things than her clients. She establishes mediumnic contact with a realm of the traumatic “real” of animated “chance,” beyond the malleable socio-

symbolic order of things that would be merely or innocently happening along people's will or intention. She empathizes with the pulsatile-energetic real that is sensed in, around, or even against the body. The diviner is meant to unveil the ancestral "immission" beneath the unknowable truth that has touched the client, namely the singular fate, sanction, bewitchment, or fundamental crisis that has befallen the latter. The "real" that divinatory practice hints at has no assimilable or qualifiable agency in itself, but appears as sheer uncertainty, indeterminacy, or overwhelming alterity. Through open-ended divinatory re-direction and subsequent ritual domestication ("cooling," "cleansing," "harvesting") as well as ancestral pacification (e.g. turning impulsive sensual ecstatic play into restraint and control), this alterity may become perceptible as a fold or habitat for the now re-inspired self.

Edith Turner—widow of Victor Turner and anthropologist at the University of Virginia—most paradoxically witnessed to her seeing with her very own eyes the reality of Ihamba spirit of affliction. It concerns her experience in Zambia in 1985 when after three decades she had come back to the old Ndembu research site, where she was once more present at a nocturnal Ihamba ritual of possession. "I saw with my own eyes a giant thing emerging out of the flesh of her [the old woman's] back. This thing was a large gray blob about six inches across, a deep gray opaque thing emerging as a sphere" (Turner et al., 1992:149). In contrast to the central African diviner's and healer's inner dreamlike and vague shadowy perception of ancestral spirit, Edith Turner reports in the early twentieth century parapsychological idiom of seeing with her eyes a big blob that she identified as "an opaqueness of plasma" (1992:165)—thus thingifying a mental state into a kind of "materiality" between solid and smoke. She reports on this as "seeing a spirit" (1992:170–1). According to Turner, this marked the beginning of the patient's physical and mental recovery. Turner's observational claim reminds us of the classical Greek and modern western body/mind, spirit or energy/matter dualism, or the Kantian and Cartesian theory of sensory perception, cognition, communication, and personhood.

Roy Willis—an anthropologist at the University of Edinburgh—brings a phenomenologically oriented, participatory, or experiential account of both a personal journey and extensive research into spirit-related experiences in Zambia that has been offered by Roy Willis et al. (1999). On the one hand, Willis self-reflectively re-visits his experiences of "expansion of self" in his own life: they entail a near-death experience in 1953 in a Zambian hospital, his lasting alertness to visions and dreams, and the discovery in himself of a healing gift that he then has embraced in the context of neo-shamanic revival in Scotland in the early 1980s. All this has set the stage for his deep empathy with Lungu mediumnic healers in northern Zambia, and for his rendering of the experience of spirit agency in affliction and healing along perspectives that outreach its mere symbolic dimension. On the other hand, Willis' aim is to convey the "wonderfulness" of spirit possession, as he witnessed during collaborative fieldwork in 1996 in Ulungu with Zambian-born assistants, two male and one female. Adopting a plural perspective, he examines his topic along the lines of neurophysical evidence on trance advanced by the studies of Rouget or Sperry and Henninger, amongst others, but also in the light of the phenomenologists such as William James, Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger (1999:117–22). He reports how much these experiences propounded to him

the inadequacy of the then current anthropological theories on spirit possession: Lewis' notion of deprivation, Victor Turner's symbolic approach, Lévi-Strauss' structuralist view, or de Heusch's perspectives on exorcism and adoricism (1999:82). Rather, Willis (1999:43) fashions his work along the lines in particular of Jeanne Favret-Saada's emic account of *Deadly words* manipulated in card-reading and the unbewitching in rural Brittany, France 1968–1972.

According to Willis, trance-possession in the Ngulu tradition in the region of Ilungu seeks to generate an atmosphere where the spirit healers, their patients, the accompanying musicians, and any other attendants including the anthropologist, come to experience a sense of “flowing” or being lifted out of normal consciousness. Here, the drumming and dancing dissolve “the boundaries of ordinary selfhood” (1999:98). Willis thus describes how the expansion of self is achieved first through integrating the social self in the interaction with the group, then gradually fusing with the spiritual self in the interaction with the Ngulu spirits summoned in the ritual to join in. The spirits, having far-reaching territorial associations, bring the entranced into communion with a broader ecology far beyond their familial bounds. They finally engage “with the utterly strange” that abolishes time and conventional linearity (1999:185). Willis' diary entry for 14 September 1996 records: “What happened last night was . . . a cosmic drama with the forces of Nature and the ancestors visible in the bodies of the women, audible in the rhythm of the drums” (1999:82). These experiences led him to an insightful definition of spirits as effecting sublinguistic inter-communication and transworld resonance: “We are all related, different versions of each other, but there are no fixed boundaries to selfhood, there is a permeability and flexibility between self and other, an infinite reflexivity, and again this sense of everything flowing within the all-encompassing rhythm of the drum” (1999:103).

For more than 20 years the Dutch writer and scholar Wim van Binsbergen wrote relentlessly on the topic of African ecstatic religion and healing. Initially a marxian anthropologist, he became director of research at the Africa Study Centre in Leiden and was subsequently named Professor of Inter-cultural Philosophy at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam. In Botswana's Francistown in 1990, following a very demanding training, van Binsbergen graduated as a *sangoma* or spirit medium and diviner (van Binsbergen 2003: ch. 5). In doing so van Binsbergen defied the color-bar in order to experience as an insider what he until then had been reporting on in neutral terms; he thus finally came to appreciate the divinatory institution's largely valid knowledge production on its own terms. In the account (reprinted in 2003: ch. 7) on his initiation as a *sangoma* in Francistown, van Binsbergen is very keen to offer empirically-grounded evidence and interdisciplinary reflection on aspects of heightened sensory perception, inter-subjectivity and transference in this border-crossing inter-cultural encounter and initiation. He describes at length his own public behavior during the weeks-long initiation in the mediumnic *sangoma* cult lodges. He analyzes this through the hosts' responses in terms of approval or disapproval, the flow of information to him or his exclusion from it, and his acceptance or rejection by his hosts. Following his initiation, van Binsbergen went on to practice geomantic tablet divination in southern Africa and in the Netherlands, where he devised a computer program allowing for worldwide *sangoma* consultation with him by internet (van Binsbergen, 2003: ch. 6; www.shikanda.net).

Van Binsbergen has since that time persistently put forward evidence of the particular heightened sensory perception in divination, submitting this data to interdisciplinary scientific scrutiny (van Binsbergen, 2003: ch. 7). He discusses significant evidence that divinatory perception cannot be willed nor summoned in the narrow space-time and transactional framework set by scientific investigation. There is, he says, an experience of a sort of “psychic osmosis” based on a kind of semi-permeability of force-effects or resonance across the boundaries of the inter-worldly or of self and other, such as diviner and client, through which “the diviner is picking up . . . traces in the natural world” (van Binsbergen, 2011—quoted from the manuscript) and in the transgenerational resonance fields. Going beyond spirit notions and spirituality, the diviner’s “working hypothesis is that of a universe all of whose parts are densely inter-connected and hence, in principle, interdependent and inter-informed” (van Binsbergen, 2011, compare with Willis, 1999:194–7). Van Binsbergen further elaborates on this resonance or inter-dependence, in reference to Rupert Sheldrake’s theory of morphogenetic fields and to the theory of non-locality—the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen paradox—in quantum physics regarding, as Brian Massumi (2002: 34) coins it, “action at a distance between elements (attractors, gradients, resonation).”

Jo Wreford, British born and bred, is since 2005 a practicing *sangoma* in Cape Town, South Africa. After some 20 years of working in community housing projects as an architect successively in the London area and in the 1990s in Zimbabwe, she specialized in social anthropology and earned a Ph.D. in 2005 at the University of Cape Town, where she is research fellow for the AIDS and Society Research Unit. Her book (Wreford, 2008) draws on her doctoral dissertation. It entails an experiential account of her research work. This deals first with the collaboration between *izangoma* or diviner-healers and—rather distrusted—biomedical community health care in Black South-Africa—one of the worst AIDS affected countries.

Most of Wreford’s witty study shares with the ethnography of the transition in the 1980s from her longstanding overpowering desolation and debilitating illness, to what became diagnosed, while in Zimbabwe, as the “brooding of the ancestors” (2008:109) and in 1999 as her “sickness of calling” (2008:104). This evolved in ancestral entrapment and the 2001 initiatory experiences and graduation in the *sangoma* art of divination and healing (traineeship in the rituals, diagnostic and healing knowledge, and feel for what matters in *sangoma*). Here, the focus is on the work of mainly three persons: her Xhosa healer-initiator and mentor Mama Nosibeli, her colleague Dr. Kubukeli (now president of the Western Cape Traditional Healers and Herbalists Association), and herself from then called Thobeka, “the one who can be trusted because she is grounded.”

The Nature and Role of the Yaka Mediumnic Diviner

I will draw on my 1972–74 fieldwork among the Yaka of southwestern Congo and my annual research sojourns of three weeks from 1986 till 2003 in Kinshasa’s shanty

towns. During *in situ* supervision of doctoral research since the 1990s, I could witness one or a few divination séances among the Kasena, Igbo, Gusii, Zulu, and Xhosa. Regarding the Ngombu cult of mediumnic divination among the Yaka, I will first look at the initiatory moulding and consecration of the diviner's acute perceptivity. I will then briefly turn to the procedure of divinatory consultation, and the oracular scrutiny (extensively documented in Devisch and Brodeur, 1999:93–123; Dumon and Devisch, 1991). My aim is a culture-sensitive and phenomenological analysis that closely follows the lines of the culture's endogenous logic and ontology as well as the group's own concerns.

The Final Initiatory Moulding and Consecration of the Diviner's Acute Perceptivity

It involves the ritual rebirth of the novice as a full-fledged practitioner while honing her newly acquired abilities. I situate my analysis in the wake of the work of a number of scholars specializing in African divination (Stroeken, 2004, 2010; van Binsbergen, 2003; Winkelman and Peek, 2004; Wreford, 2008). Corporeally identifying with the egg-laying hen and the otter-shrew, the diviner is led to turn her perpetual self-renewing outdoing of divides such as human/nonhuman, inside/outside, visible/invisible, into her new capacity for inter-modal and transworld communication. The house of initiatory seclusion, the community's enchanting songs at the initiation, the slit gong and its rhythmic beat, as well as the ointment with kaolin or red paste, invite the novice to embody or infoliate a new skin-self. Her stay in the ritual house of seclusion is compared to a hen's egg-laying and brooding. The novice's gestures and walk—in particular her cries and mode of looking around from left to right—are inspired by those of a hen. The hen, the only biped domestic animal, is a vivid signifier of intermediacy: it jumps from the ground to the roof, runs from house to house, nibbles prepared foods, ranges between the forest and the village, and marks the transition between night and day with its crowing; similarly, the egg is an intermediary between that which transmits and that which receives life. The hen catches the popular imagination, not only by its conduct and warning cries, but also by its leaping or flying away in the face of aggression (see further Devisch and Brodeur, 1999: ch. 2). Somewhere in its sixth to ninth month, the initiatory seclusion comes to an end, namely when the novice breaks out of the seclusion house or hut in the manner of a chick hatching from its egg.

The initiatory rebirth into a diviner entails the grafting in the novice's body of the inter-species empathy qualifying the flair of the hunting dog and that of the amphibious otter-shrew. The slit-gong depicts her acquiring a keen inter-world perceptiveness. It is a log—long as a newborn but of a width to hold in one hand—hollowed through its oblong slit with vaginal connotations. Capped by a head, bearing an amalgamation of human and animal features (chicken, tortoise, chameleon), the whole takes on a phallic-like shape. The slit gong functions as a resonating envelope, voice and ear, very much as the diviner's double (called *yilesi*). The slit gong figures as an open womb and the beating enacts the pulsating bond of the living with “the uterine and originary

chthonic womb or source of all life," *ngoongu*. The diviner thus becomes the uterine voice of the perennial womb of the world.

A Divinatory Consultation

Procedure requires that the consultants see a diviner, performing in the inter-regional Ngombu cult of affliction, who lives at least a day's walk from the client's home. This is to make sure that she knows nothing by hearsay of the sort of afflictions the client and kingroup are going through—I use the term "client" to refer to the one who has recently deceased, or is actually ill or afflicted. The consultants arrive unannounced and directly give the diviner a double, literally "the shadow" (*yiniinga*, see below) of the client: it is a strip of cloth from the latter or a piece of kaolin, or a few nail clippings, hair, or spittle from the client, or some sand taken from her or his shadow image on the ground. It has the night before been placed above the client's heart—which is seen as a major fold of conscience and reflexivity. The client is not present at the consultation, nor is the corpse ever physically brought to the diviner.

Entering the preliminary phase to the consultation, shortly after the arrival of the clients, the diviner does a lithe and lively dance to the rhythm of the slit-gong she plays. From time to time, she sniffs the client's double or holds it in front of a small mirror. Meanwhile, she places her divination basket between her and the consultants. She then smears white clay on her left wrist, signifying her bonds with "the uterine and originary chthonic womb of life." The diviner then crouches over her gong—adopting a position similar to that of a woman in childbirth—the slit turned towards the consultants.

While beating her gong, the diviner may start the consultation's initial phase by interrogating the oracular grid in an archaic wording. This is chanted in a monotone voice, called *kedibila*, literally, interpolate or debate, thus setting the scene towards unconcealing the unspeakable in the client's consciousness and lifeworld. These barely intelligible mythical terms are taken up by way of refrain by a chorus of consultants in an enchanting tempo. The esoteric wording offers no precise significant or specific information at this stage. Meanwhile the consultants are drawn into the process and even incited to do some introspection. Unassisted by the consultants, the diviner must rely entirely on her dreamwork and acute flair to approximately seize the consultants' concern. The diviner may come to utter her initial reading of the case by evoking some barely specified signifiers, such as "I see a bereavement;" "I see a man wounded at the hunt;" "Cursing has tied shut your wife's uterine life flow;" or "Bewitchment has been fatal at your home." These tentative statements or markers of problematic elements in the case remain as yet without much precise contextual clarification or application.

The initial phase of the consultation serves to inscribe the consultants' concerns into the self-legitimizing space-time of the authoritative divinatory work of unconcealment. With the consultants' perfunctory agreement, expressed in terms of their request that "the oracle further sorts out what is on the body of the deceased," the diviner may wait for some initial payment. This, together with the expectations that the consultants may develop, add to the co-implication developing between them and the diviner.

It furthers the transference relation before initiating the etiological oracle proper—habitually, the next morning.

The Oracular Disclosure of the Client's Shadowy Double

In the Yaka perspective concerning Ngombu divination, everything that is evoked by the slit-gong and the diviner-initiand's conduct, fundamentally relates to both emerging, breeding or self-renewing forms of being, hence shadowy, untamed, or passionate forces: the brooding hen, orgasm, gestation, parturition, spirits, the night, death-agony, or trance-possession. Such forms of being, conditions, or milieus and expressions of forces populate men's and women's attraction for what reaches beyond the order and limits of their known and domesticated world. It is an appeal for invisible and untamed forces, or unthought sources of desire, worry, and sadness, such as sleep or dream, arousal or anger, enthusiasm or anxiety, cursing or witchcraft. They may also haunt the collective imaginary with unanswerable questions, dark holes, blanks, or unthought-in-thought. In order to unveil the pressing shadow zone in the client or consultants and family, the diviner interrogates her recent dreamwork and applies her keen perceptive abilities to the full. In divinatory perspective, the fate behind a family trauma unleashes itself basically in the client's "shadow" (*yiniinga*, literally, something that swings at, *niinga*, and somehow destabilizes the [client's body] borders). Indeed, this shadow or double is always with yet *extimate* to me, that is, nestling in and somehow doubling my innermost self. My shadow, very much like my dream, projects me beyond the space-time limits of my body. This extimacy witnesses to unspeakable wishes, refusals, denials, unruly drives, or impulses in my unfathomable desire. Yet, these are often thwarted or contested by the desire of others, as such called as envy, greed, intrusion, witchcraft, or sorcery.

That extimacy in me may be haunted by unsettling experiences or undisclosable—yet easily rekindled—memory images and traces or webs and plots of the personal or family imaginary in the past and present. Dreams, trance, a startling experience, some keen intuitive discernment regarding powerful words, transgressions or intrusions in the presence of the afflicted, may instigate the diviner to gropingly enunciate this shadowy zone of the client and those concerned by way of uttering mere evocative signifiers. In the subject's dreams or heightened experience, that shadow offers itself as something extimate to the self, inasmuch as it may help her or him to express some grasp—beyond reason—of a desire shared with a complicit other or of a trauma that is unconsciously at work amongst family members. At the same time, that shadow both manifests, confines and obnubilates the lack or holes in the subject's and family's representations of their inter-subjective and inter-world weave.

The Divinatory Oracle Operates an Etiological Scrutiny

Very much comparable to the intention characteristic of the divinatory seances that I have witnessed in other parts of Africa, the Yaka diviner's scrutiny unfolds in line with

the culture's *axiological or moral order* regarding life's basic concern with *unescapable and sustainable reciprocity*, the root model being that of the mother–child dyad and the uterine blood bond. This order bears the self-evident status of *k'amba*–in yiYaka–, which literally means “*is it not so that,*” “*is it not evident that.*” It alludes to the propensity of the things of life across the generations, the sphere of the inescapable, of assigned fate, including the unfathomable blanks in the surreptitious transgenerational transmission of trauma, preferences or avoidances and secrets.

Diviners say that the oracular statements voiced by them stem from their interrogation of the slit-gong. As etiological discourse, the oracle proper displaces the diviner from center stage; she is no longer the subjective source or self-reflective author of the enunciation, the one entitled to disclose and interpret the course of events. It is now the Ngombu spirit and the uterine life-source, *ngoongu*, speaking through the slit-gong, that re-situate the consultant's concern within the life-bearing versus life-harming potential of the family. In other words, the oracle is the voice of the self-reliant uterine life-flow from which the client and those concerned stem, and into which they tap, in both good and ill health. Furthermore, the oracle discloses the logic or truth of society's axiological or moral order of sustainable sociality, namely the Law of Exchange in the family and thus of life's socially constructed fabric, flourishing or undermined, in the matriline (Devisch, 2009:264–71; Devisch and Brodeur, 1999:93–154).

The oracle's etiological discernment proper appears as a kind of multi-sensory and ethical scrutiny of the propensity of the things of life in the client's lifeworld, and of the shared desire and reciprocity in the past and present afflictions in the client's family. Divinatory etiology is first of all founded on the principle that anything which inhibits or obstructs life may ultimately be attributed to one or another instance of transgression against the order of basal reciprocity.

By finally singling out, for example, some basic transgression and the subsequent vindictive sorcery or the curse enticing ancestral wrath, the oracle makes a crucial violation of the client's vital weave localizable, specific and manageable. It is to be followed by a family council that should negotiate decisions for averting evil or for healing the afflicted, next to the renewal of the social and cosmic fabrics. Yet, the oracle nor the family council and the maternal uncle appear as salvationist agencies in the pursuit of higher Truth or the Good. It is within the intricate complex of affects, energies, and life-bearing or life-taking forces that the maternal uncle, like also the family council, is seen as a highly ambivalent agent capable of shifting from an intrusive role to a generous and corroborating co-implication in the uterine web. Indeed, the maternal uncle's status is such that he can both authorise or prevent life-taking.

The Bodiliness of Perception, Inter-subjectivity, and Transworld Resonance

A Perspectival Approach

The adopted approach endorses the perspectival ontology at play in the diviner's initiation and the divinatory unconcealment. The perspectival approach draws on the later

Merleau-Ponty's (1964) treatment of the body-subject. It also draws on his plural perspectivism of acute and elucidating perception, when we come to perceive our lifeworld from the perspectives of our fellow-subjects and the significant inter-animating features in our lifeworld. Starting from the pre-reflective experience of being-in-the-world, this approach helps to follow the diviner's situated grasp of the client as body-subject. It helps to understand the diviner's sense of the client's world on the level of "flesh" (*la chair*) as a tissue of sensible and desirous being-in-the-world. Along this perspective, Merleau-Ponty thinks perception as the perceiving subject being her- or himself a part of the world. The diviner or researcher appears as "flesh" of both body and world, that is as being drawn as a sensible and desirous being into the things of the world as they wish to be touched, seen, embodied. This perspective helps to disclose the diviner's participation in the multi-sensate pre-possession of the unconcealment by the very sensible but muted or shadowy depth of the unconcealed. It offers an innovative point of departure for my theorization of the diviner's acute perceptiveness of the latent memory traces and imaginary plots at play in the lifeworld and weaves of the client and family.

More concretely, diviners say it is the slit-gong itself which utters the oracle. As argued above, the gong acts as the initiate's double, turning the diviner on herself into an outreaching touch, eye and ear, both tangible, visible, audible, and at the same time touching, seeing, and speaking. This embodied identification, I contend, brings the diviner's slit-gong close to what can amount to some radical perspectival ontological move evocative of the "*Thinking through things*" among others by the shaman in Cuba, as developed by Martin Holbraad (Henare et al., 2007). In the Yaka culture, the master-diviner does not consecrate the slit-gong in its acute perceptive and maieutic function until the confirmation of the initiand as mediumnic diviner. Only then can the initiand touch her slit-gong and call upon its disclosing and genitivity function.

Far from viewing the divinatory art in terms of a mode of extrasensory clairvoyance, the Yaka culture treats it as *mediumnic*. It is thanks to her acute perceptive sense, intuition, and divinatory skills that the diviner is able to gain track of the problem and unconceal the non yet thought-out in the case submitted to the oracle. In such a culture and worldview, the diviner uttering the voice of the slit-gong is granted an authority, beyond and above any other, to act as a medium or voice of both the divinatory oracle and the unspeakable in the family reality. Moreover, the perspicacity of the diviner's words taps into her dreamwork and scrutinizing flair for sensing out the tracks of envy, malignity, and bewitchment in the family. As the initiation portrays, the divinatory perspicaciousness unravels the blockages and unconceals the modus for properly fostering again the uterine life-flow and vital weave as well as the Law of Exchange and ethic of desire in the consulting kin-group and its lifeworld.

The observations on the Yaka divinatory scrutiny and disclosure of the client's shadowy double should be sufficient to discourage any attempt—such as that made by Myhre (2006a, 2006b, 2007) along the lines of Wittgenstein's work—to reducing divinatory comprehension to a mere language-oriented and pragmatic enactment of the order of facts, to a plain reproduction of a grammar of conduct, social pragmatics or the constitutive rules of society and social practice. Here I diverge from Wittgenstein's view that the limits of our world are the limits of language and vice versa. The

oracle, I maintain, is not only or merely an enunciation of linguistic evidence, it is firmly and very sensorially grafted into the framework of the consultant's cosmology and pact with the lived-in world with its dense memory sites and other commonly shared meaning-markers. Indeed, the oracle inscribes its elucidation in the familiar scenes of inter-corporeity, inter-subjectivity, and local transworld inter-connectivity with their dense and shared but unspoken assumptions and tracks of co-resonance and communication between worlds that also entail the reference to spiritual agencies.

A Matrixial View

Divination engages with encompassing *existential realms* of human reality that are replete with forces. Taken on a more intimate level, however, the notion of forces requires a genuinely matrixial mode of comprehension. It demands a sensuous and rhizomatic, merely corporeal and sublinguistic opening-up to, and an intuitive feel-thinking of, the oneiric, pulsional, and affective streams of inter-corporeal motivations and inter-subjective moods or messages, resonance, and inter-communication between humans, ancestors, and non-human agents and worlds, whether visible and tangible or not. Moreover, by way of a transition ritual of death and rebirth—in the manner of brooding—the Ngombu initiation effects a transworld passage—in the manner of the otter-shrew. It brings about an ontological change in both the diviner-novice and her slit-gong as her very double. This urged me to seek some additional heuristic input from a matrixial approach of the pre- and post-natal *infans*—mother co-resonance captured by way of feel-thinking and co-implication as devised by Bracha Ettinger (2006). Ettinger's matrixial theory proves moreover heuristic for dealing with the inter-generational and inter-subjective “response-ability” to the traumatic hieroglyphs of one's lifeworld. It helps to assess the diviner's transworld utterances from the uterine slit-gong. Understood along the lines drawn by Ettinger, the diviner senses out the client's inter-generational, inter-subjective and inter-corporeal pre-representational matrix or space of com-position with the other.

My observation that initiation produces an ontological change in the diviner-novice encourages me to pursue Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach of the body-subject in view of reaching, in line with Ettinger's matrixial theory, the issue of unmitigated connectivity, transitivity and inter-animation between the realms of thing, place and being. Ettinger's post-Lacanian psychoanalytical perspective allows us to revisit the originary processes of permeability or of opening and relating in the border-zone between body and psyche of mother and child. Ultimately, combining the phenomenological and matrixial perspectives in a complementary approach provides us the means to more properly grasp agency, feel-thinking and subsymbolic *signifiance* such as they emerge in the matrixial ambience of divination (or the healing cults). Ettinger's matrixial approach provides fresh insights to comprehend the oracle from within the diviner's oneiric perceptivity and disclosure—by way of a birthing process—regarding the client's condition of being-in-the-world. A diviner, understood along Ettinger's perspective, senses out the psychic archive of some unfathomable social or family history of trauma. The sort of *signifiance* that is elaborated in divination entails

a subsymbolic and largely unconscious groping for tracks of co-implication. These may subsume unconsciously furnished memory traces of unthought-in-thought, or undisclosable traumatic hieroglyphs in the family history and present disruption and inter-subjective violence and death-forces in the family webs. They form a shadow side piercing through in webs of imaginings and shared signifiers in the life and encompassing lifeworld of the client and her or his family. The shadow zone moreover reaches into bivalent *jouissance* (an enjoyment that is both enchanting and toxic, as Jacques Lacan sees it) and the unnameable, impossible to imagine or integrate into the symbolic order. It may regard the uncannily engulfing or ensorcelling void, or *das Ding* (the radical nature of the hole or loss that, in line with Freud's view, keeps us from being one with ourselves or our words). It is a void that may unconceal itself through lapses, dreams, bungled actions. It is an estranging otherness that disarticulates meaning, thereby abandoning the body to downright *jouissance*, such as in bewitchment, utter disillusionment, or despair. And *jouissance* always leaves a remainder which cannot fully be verbalised: the *objet a[utre]* (in the Lacanian sense).

CHAPTER 5

Orality, Literature, and African Religions

Jonathan A. Draper and Kenneth Mtata

Introduction

John Mbiti, a leading figure in the study of African Traditional Religion, remarks perceptively in his *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969):

One of the difficulties in studying African Religions and philosophy is that there are no sacred scriptures. Religion in African societies is written not on paper but in people's hearts, minds, oral history, rituals and religious personages like the priests, rainmakers, officiating elders and even kings. Everybody is a religious carrier. Therefore we have to study not only the beliefs concerning God and the spirits, but also the religious journey of the individual from before birth to after physical death; and to study also the persons responsible for formal rituals and ceremonies (Mbiti, 1969:4).

African religion¹ is not only oral in its orientation; it is essentially performative and communal. Even when religious tradition has been recorded or transcribed and printed by Western anthropologists, transcriptions of African religious oral texts cannot speak by themselves. The oral texts must be performed in order to be effective, as Ruth Finnegan points out with regard to oral poetry:

To reach its full actualization, [oral literature] *must be performed*. The text alone cannot constitute the oral poem. This *performance* aspect of oral poetry is sometimes forgotten, even though it lies at the heart of the whole concept of oral literature. It is easy to concentrate on an analysis of the verbal elements—on style and content, imagery, or perhaps transmission. All this has its importance for oral literature, of course. But one *also* needs to remember the circumstances of the performance of a piece—this is not a secondary or peripheral matter, but integral to the identity of the poem as actually realized (Finnegan, 1977:29).

Thus orality involves performance which includes interaction with an audience through song, dance, movement, and gest.² This also means that African tradition is continually fluid and dynamic in nature, changing imperceptibly in response to changed circumstances, since there is no “archetype” against which to check a performance, even though there is continuity in that there are limits to acceptable diversity in the communal reception of a performance. The collective representation of oral tradition in performance is what constitutes African religious worldviews, which are usually implicit and assumed to be known, rather than explicitly stated (Vansina, 1985:114–6; cf. Lienhardt, 1954, esp. 138–9).

A further difficulty lies in defining what constitutes the specifically *religious* in African oral tradition, since, in a sense, all tradition is religious. Religion is embedded and pervasive in a way that it no longer is in the west after the Enlightenment.³ Ruth Finnegan suggests three defining marks:

Firstly, the content may be religious, as in verse about mythical actions of gods or direct religious instruction or invocation. Secondly, the poetry may be recited by those who are regarded as religious specialists. Thirdly, it may be performed on occasions which are generally agreed to be religious ones (Finnegan, 1970:167–8).

Finnegan rightly also makes a close connection between African religious poetry and rites of passage, and perhaps no more precise definition than this is possible. Isidore Okpewho’s important book, *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character, and Continuity* (1992), does not even include a section on religion or religious oral poetry. Yet he sees oral tradition as the means by which people “acquire, on a general or collective basis, information concerning themselves: who they are, their origins and connections, and the peculiar ways of living and behaving that identify them as a people and that must be preserved for the sake of cultural continuity” (Finnegan, 1970:115). In other words, religion is not a separate category, but is found diffused through the “songs, narratives, proverbs, riddles” of African tradition.

Religion, Orality, and “Primal Religion”

It is, however, important to avoid the kind of western romanticization of African oral religion—with its implicit evolutionist overtones—as possessing some kind of lost primal innocence, deriving from Jean Jacques Rousseau’s “noble savage”, even in the sophisticated form presented by Claude Levi-Strauss. The “great divide” between oral and literate cultures, such as that popularized by Marshall McLuhan’s, *Gutenberg Galaxy* (1960) and given a more sophisticated statement in Walter J. Ong’s *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982) cannot be sustained (though note the cautions of Botha, 2004). African cultures have interacted with the literate cultures of the Mediterranean, as well as those of the near and far east for thousands of years—both influencing and being influenced by them (see e.g. Byron, 2009 on the Axumite Empire; Graf, 2009 on ancient incense trade routes; while excavations at Zimbabwe Ruins have yielded material from as far afield as China). The sacred scripts of both Christianity and Islam have cast a shadow much wider even than their direct adherents, long before the colonization of Africa. Indigenous African scripts exist from north,

west and east Africa: Demotic and Coptic in Egypt; Geez/Amharic in Ethiopia; Meroitic in Sudan; Vai, Bassa, Mende, Nsibidi, Shumon in West Africa. The continued function of oral tradition does not depend on ignorance of writing, and it does not die out with the transcription of oral tradition:

After a tradition has been recorded it does not die out *ipso facto*. On the contrary, for a while traditions continue still to be told and may at a later time once again be recorded. In their turn written records may serve as a fountainhead for oral tradition. Thus a mixed period of transmission comes into existence and can last for a long period (Vansina, 1985:31).

In fact, there is often an interdependence of the oral and the written form (Finnegan, 1977:71–84; Goody, 1987:87–107). The oral medium continues to be reflected in written forms long after members of a primary oral society become literate (Opland, 1983; Cope, 1986). Oral tradition continues to develop long after it is first set down in writing, and this can lead to multiple versions of the same “text,” which cannot be explained by means of text or redaction criticism.

This is important to note because, for the most part, African religions continue to operate within the oral mode, in spite of the introduction of literacy and missionary forms of Christianity and Islam. This has consequences for any understanding of African religion, past and present. Because there is no “master text” for reference the traditions change imperceptibly but are experienced as in continuity—which indeed they are in their essence. Yet the present and not the past or the future is the arbiter of what survives since, “All messages have some intent which has to do with the present, otherwise they would not be told in the present and the tradition would die out. So all messages have another aim besides their possible historical aim” (Vansina, 1985:92). When entrusted to or incarnated in indigenous oral tradition, the sacred scriptures of Christianity and Islam change their topography subtly (cf. Sanneh, 1989, 1993; Bediako, 1992; 1995).

Even when African Christians sit with printed Bibles on their laps today, their interaction in sermon, song, dance and testimony is oral and laden with the deep impulses of indigenous African religious practice (cf. Draper, 2006). For instance, in the new African Initiated Churches, with their emphasis on inspired prophets and prophecy, orally composed prophecies, testimonies, narratives, and myths may be written down, re-performed and then incorporated into histories, hymns and liturgies in new texts. So one finds multiple versions of prophecies and hymns in the handwritten scripts of George Khambule’s *Ibandla Labancwele* (Draper, 2006) and multiple forms of the histories and laws, testimonies and hymns of Isaiah Shembe and his followers, some of which are now in print (Gunner, 2002), but which continue to evolve in the competitive atmosphere of rival branches of the church. The hymns of Shembe were transcribed in his lifetime into one book, which was buried with him, so that it is difficult to know which of the hymns were written by Isiaah Shembe and which by his successors.

Likewise, the pervasive influence of the Qur’an in African cultures influenced by Islam has not ended their rich oral traditions but has led to the evolution of new oral forms such as the homiletic and narrative poems of the Swahili *tenzi* (Finnegan, 1970:168–175; Goody, 1987:125–138; cf. Ryan, 2000:284–304) and new forms of the ancient West African songs of the *griot/griotte* focusing on the Prophet and his

struggles with adversaries (Hale, 1998:64–7). Among the Yoruba, Islam is incorporated into the Yoruba ancestor tradition with the conversion of three of the legendary Orunmila to Islam. The traditional diviners urge him to tolerate their new faith. This produced a kind of “symbiosis between Islam and the Traditionalist faith of the Yoruba” so that “Ifa and the other salient features of the Yoruba religious tradition play a large role in the spiritual lives of Muslim and Christian Yoruba alike” (Ryan, 2000:299). Traditional religionists often revere the Qu’ran, even burying it in shrines where sacrifices may be offered (2000:299). A new wave of Sufi spirituality is also producing new forms of African Islam with a greater emphasis on oral tradition (Roberts et al., 2003; though note the reservations of Sitoto, 2009).

Orality, Textuality, and Religion during the Colonial Era

Textuality was a distinguishing factor between western missionaries and colonialists and many local African peoples. Usurpation of control over land was often based on the local African ruler’s misunderstanding of the written contract. Lobengula, who thought he was only giving temporary permit for Rhodes’ British South African Company to explore for minerals was surprised to realize that he had been duped, through putting an “X” in a straight line, in giving up his control over land. Since it was not part of autochthonous traditions to give away land, which had sacred links with the ancestors, it was absurd to him to think that he was selling land for good.

The tension between orality and writing in colonial southern Africa is vividly illustrated in the trial of King Cetshwayo kaMpande (Webb and Wright, 1987). After being questioned and accused of maintaining a culture that was oppressive and challenged to change his customs, Cetshwayo responded by arguing that changing cultures may seem easy when it is not your own culture. To prove his point he asked if Sir J.D. Barry, who was interrogating him, could “give up” on his culture of “writing and simply talk” (Webb and Wright, 1987:75). Of course, Sir J.D. Barry did not answer the question in point.

This disdain for orality was for these new comers an “epistemological problem” (Peek and Yankah, 2004:421). With notable exceptions (e.g. Bishop John William Colenso in Natal⁴), it led them to neglect oral resources in African societies that could have helped them to appreciate the cultural wealth of the indigenous peoples. Oral performances and rituals were dismissed as “indices of the backwardness of the natives in the march from dark past toward civilisation, on a road along which they themselves and their societies back home had made giant strides” (Peek and Yankah, 2004:421). The colonial and missionary era was marked in 1840 by the “four-hundredth anniversary of the invention of the movable type,” and the celebration characterized those societies who had “print literacy” as “blessed by God” while those still in oral tradition as living in darkness.

On the other hand, while the missionaries and colonial authorities controlled the text and its distribution, which constituted the “official transcript” of colonial discourse (Opland, 1986:135–50), they had no way of controlling the oral medium that facilitated the development of the “hidden transcript” of the oppressed “off stage” (Scott,

1990). Indeed, the mission educated elite often formed the vanguard of this resistance, while the churches offered points of organization after the destruction of local kingdoms (Draper, 2003). The developing Christian oral traditions could draw unimpeded on the resources offered by the underlying oral traditions of African religions. This process, in turn, helped to value and preserve these traditions under colonial domination.

The disparagement of African religion and its oral traditions ended with political independence from colonial rule when the search began for their own cultural roots by African intellectuals (although it had begun much earlier in the debate among the mission educated elite, such as Colenso's converts, Magera Fuze, William Ngidi, and Undiane: see Fuze, 1922; Khumalo, 2004; Mokoena, 2009). It also coincided with a renewed interest in oral tradition in Western scholarship that emerged in the 1970s and 1990s, sometimes built on previous evolutionist presuppositions, as we have suggested. Such studies acknowledged that oral tradition and African religion were inseparably connected. More interesting still is their recognition that the oral traditions found continuity particularly in the African Initiated Churches that broke away from missionary control in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (such as the Zionist movements in Southern Africa; the Aladura movements in Nigeria, see Peel, 1968; the *Fifohazana* movement in Madagascar, see Ogilvie, 2008). Duncan Brown (1995, 1998, 2009), for instance, traces the line of oral tradition in South Africa from the Khoi San and other indigenous traditions through to the re-contextualization of Shaka's praise poetry in the Nazareth Baptist Church of Isaiah Shembe (cf. Muller, 2004; Gunner, 2002).

Orality and Material Representation

While most African cultures did not have access to text in the pre-colonial era, they did have access to other material sacred representations that served as *aides mémoires* and points of entry into the world of spirit through oral performance.

Rock Paintings

The "most ancient of southern African's surviving peoples" (Perry, 1999:27), the *Khoi-San* or the *Ju/'hoansi* are known, among other traits, for their rock painting. These paintings are an aspect of their oral religious culture. Ouzman (1998:32) argues that the paintings embodied "the 'unspeakable' or the transcendent, something our language is largely incapable of . . . [it is not] a form of language, nor is it a text, though it does communicate" (Ouzman, 1998:32). This distinction is important for two reasons, according to Ouzman. First, the "rock-art panel is not reducible to the linearity of text; instead individual motifs are visually apprehended in an unstable, often random manner and their meanings are thus constantly shifting . . . Sentences and texts progressively limit the potential meanings of an image, compromising its polysemy. Secondly, rock-art images are not like signifiers and have no necessary and sufficient relation of

relevance with a signified. Images are often things in themselves and not something standing for something else" (Ouzman, 1998:32). This is in line with the surprising openness, diversity and fluidity of Khoi-San cosmology and religious tradition as recorded from oral performance, which has an emphasis on individual religious experience in trance but nevertheless has an identifiable core:

The core elements of the Khoisan tradition, which are abstracted from a multifaceted, fluid, and highly variable complex of beliefs, are a dual notion of divinity; a trickster figure who is both protagonist and god; vaguely defined spirits of the dead; a cosmogonic notion of an early order of existence and race of people, and its transformation into the present order; a closeness to animals, who are significant economically, mystically, and symbolically; ritual trance, both as a curing technique that draws on a mystical force or potency and as a means for transformation and transcendence; and male and female initiation rites (Guenther, 1999:88).

Guenther argues that this love of story telling, wide ranging movement and hospitality to new ideas has tended to accelerate this fluidity of Khoisan religious tradition.

Sculpture

In Zimbabwe the Shona people were and are still known for their sculpture as artefacts with longstanding religious significance. While early colonial romanticizations of Shona sculpture have been rejected as exaggeration (Zilberg, 2002:108–10; cf Skogh, 2001). Zilberg is correct in emphasizing their significance as representations of the Shona spirit world. The eagle, for instance, is seen as an embodiment of important ancestral spirits (Zilberg, 2002:108). In many parts of Africa, masks, ritual stools and axes, often elaborately carved, together with necklaces, are used in the context of oral performance to enhance or signal the representation of cosmological myths.

Sacred Places, Objects and Persons as Cues to Oral Performance

Apart from art and sculpture, places, objects and persons are also endowed with sacredness as embodiments and cues to oral religious tradition among southern African peoples. Oral performances in many southern African cultures are located in particular places at particular times. It is for this reason that the process of deciphering the significance of a performance must include the analysis of *where* the performance is taking place. This has become clearer in the pilgrimage songs in the African Indigenous Churches (AICs). The association of the AICs with sacred places has been observed. Most of them have "Holy cities", "Jeruselems," "Mount Zions," and "Bethesdas." In Zaire Simon Kimbangu's "New Jerusalem" is at N'Kamba; Shembe's "Jerusalem" is at Ekuphalameni near Durban and his "Zion" at Mount Nhlalakazi further north; Ma Nku's "Temple of Jerusalem on Mount Zion" is at Evaton; Lekganyane's "Zion City" Morija is near Pietersburg (Ngubane, 1986:83). Even those churches that do not have

these holy places find ways of creating sacred spaces for healing because from their African religious background, accessing a higher concentration of the divine requires specially marked out places. Once the right place has been properly prescribed, the participants experience salvation “here-and-now” in the context of the salvific dimensions of traditional African ritual systems (Ngubane, 1986:83). Sundkler has suggested that the reason why mountain and high places in particular are used could be that they elicit a sense of nearness to God as well as that water places are associated with ritual (1976:315).

Songs carry the oral religious aspect of such places. The pilgrim songs to these holy places are easily identifiable among the Nazareth Baptists of Isaiah Shembe. Though most of them have now been written down, this does not supersede their performative texture and lustre:

Greetings Phakama
 Greetings Judea
 Where have you sent our brothers
 Who were sent to you . . .
 Gates of Phakama
 Lift us up let us enter
 We have overcome our weaknesses
 Just as others have.
 Come O come
 We are going to the place on high
 May the one who is coming be praised
 At Ekuphakameni.
 Jehovah do not leave
 That high place
 Ring it around Lord
 On all four sides
 (Gunner's translation of Maphumulo, 1942)

Gunner has observed that this (now written as Hymn 6) refers to the “gates of Eku-phakameni as a metonym for the gates of heaven, and in its opening it uses the device of direct address and personification so familiar in the oral genre of *izibongo* (praise poetry)” (Gunner, 2006:163). In this sense, oral performance is cartographic and can be fully appreciated as one's ability to interpret this oral map increases.⁵ These oral performances of creation and control over sacred space must be understood as ritual reversal of “dis-placement” in the context of apartheid in South Africa and colonialism in the rest of Africa. Oral performance becomes ritual of “land acquisition through a filial bond with the spiritual guardians of land”—the ancestral spirits (Ogude, 1999:90).

Memory Boards, Scarification, and Necklaces

In advanced initiation cults of the ancient Luba kings, extensive use is made of small hand held memory boards, which have a series of pegs which cue the oral performance

of myths and rituals (Roberts and Roberts, 1996, 1997). They enable the oral performance of complex sets of historical and religious tradition, often in conjunction with scarification, necklaces and other ritual artifacts. Ritual scarification, removal of a finger tip, chipping of teeth and other bodily markings (cf. Favazza, 1987) are widely used to signal cultural identity and to encode and cue oral religious performance.

Drumming, Singing, Movement, and Dance in Oral Performance

It is hard to conceive of the performance of African oral tradition without the accompanying aspects of drumming, singing, movement and dance. Musical instruments, such as drums, bows attached to gourds, *mbira* (finger xylophone) and *karimba* are an indispensable part of oral memory, whether played by the performer or members of the audience (see the work and publications of Andrew Tracey and David Dargie and ILAM—the International Library of African Music—at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa). Rhythmic beat and movement interact with the metric patterns and contours of the oral material, whether it is “composed in performance” or memorized. Thus the *griot* in West Africa shares features with the epic poems of ancient Greek and modern Serbo-Croat tradition, according to the Parry-Lord hypothesis. However, new hymns and liturgies may be composed orally in the same way today (as Dargie has demonstrated; cf. Dargie, 1998). This combination of oral tradition and body movement contributes to the heightened element of religious experience in oral performance. Some religions in Africa encourage spirit possession and trance—as we have noted already with respect to the Khoi-San trance curing dance. Even in African Christianity, the combination of music and movement in oral religious performance makes revival, prophecy and experience of the Spirit in worship a widespread feature.

Praise Poetry: Orality, Religion, and the Ancestors

Many African oral traditions are characterized by praise songs to the living and to the living dead, as well as lists of ancestors, which are closely linked to the cosmology and religious consciousness of Africans:

Genealogies are among the most complex sources in existence. As taxonomies they are used all over the world for speculating about origins. As social charters, they validate relationships between groups in many societies, both centralized and uncentralized. They are therefore manipulated whenever such relationships change (Vansina, 1985:182).

Human ancestors or founders of the nation/ clan are often associated with a special act of God/gods—as in the case of Nyikang in Shilluk oral tradition (Lienhardt, 1954:146) or ancestors may become divine figures—as in the case of the Ganda (Kalengyo, 2006). Indeed, some have disputed whether there is a concept of a creator God in African culture at all or only divinized ancestors (Sawyer, 1970), though most accept the ancestors as mediators between humanity and the High God. In any case, as Ogbu Kalu has said, “The reality of the dead-among-the-living attracts so much

religious devotion that in many African societies the ancestors occupy more devotional attention than God/Supreme Being. In some communities, no cultic attention is paid to the divinities; in others the divinities are scions of the ancestral spirits for prediction and control of space-time events" (Kalu, 2000:54–5). Hence the importance of remembering and honouring the ancestors both at the national level, where they may provide legitimation for royal power, such as the Kabaka of Buganda or the kings of Rwanda and Burundi, as well as the clan and family level, where they link the individual to the power mediated by the ancestors as living dead. The praise song is the usual oral vehicle for this. Kalu cites an example from a thesis by C. O. Nwokwor (1990) of an invocation of the grand ancestral spirit Odo Ububa from Igbo tradition, which, with variations, is echoed in many forms in Africa. The first and second parts are separated by oral praise songs to the ancestors:

Please, we solicit for your protection.

As you have returned, our lives are in your custody.

Never you accept any evil to befall us.

You are the great kings of a great town.

You are aware of all that happened in the past, in the present and the ones that will happen in the future.

Odo, you are welcome;

Protect us;

Give us good life;

Give us long life;

Give us prosperity (Kalu, 2005:64).

The oral poem is accompanied by ritual dance and sacrifice. The living have the hope, in their turn, of becoming ancestors, mediating protection and prosperity to their families, hence the saying, "May my name never be lost" (Kalu, 2005:55). Praise poems are essentially concerned with preserving names of significant ancestors.

Genealogies found in praise poems are not easily used as historical data, since oral transmission results in a telescoping of consciousness between the first ancestors and the remembered living dead (Vansina, 1985). Vansina, whose concern is historical data, observes that when oral accounts "have been told for a generation or so the messages then current may still represent the tenor or the original message, but in most cases the resulting story has been fused out of several accounts and has acquired a stabilized form," hence the difficulty of using them for historical reconstruction since there is "no question of reconstructing any original or even assuming that there was but one original" (1985:17). The process begins with what he calls the "historical gossip" through which all kinds of "news and hearsay generated as events occur and communicated through the usual channels of communication in a community do not disappear when the novelty has worn off" (Vansina, 1985:17). So for example, the king's wife could be impregnated by the king's son or one of the chiefs and someone will know it or will suspect it. The rate at which the oral tradition develops and later maybe performed as praise poetry may not be predictable. However, for African culture, the first ancestors and the current ancestors are the focus of veneration and the ones

from whom blessing is expected, so that historical data is not really significant in the same way as in the West.

In much praise poetry, the process has been skewed towards royalty. In some traditional southern African cultures, praise poetry would be located within this task of preserving collective memory, without however, diminishing the oral heritage of each individual family's link to the ancestors. The three most important African family rituals—matrimony, birth, and burial—are the moments in which the ancestors' self-preservation by reproduction are performed. At birth the main ritual may include the local gossip that confirms the legitimacy of the born child by singing about its features. At marriage, especially at the Mapinzo process among the Karanga people of Zimbabwe, ritual songs and actions are performed to confirm that the couple to be married do not have any unknown marital attachment elsewhere. Among the Zulu, the bride is actually introduced to the ancestors at the most sacred place, the kraal, in which she will be presented as one who would perpetuate the reproduction of the ancestors' name. Among the Zezuru people of Zimbabwe, the burial rituals include moments in which the friends of the deceased mimic his or her well-known characteristics. All these oral performances are directly linked to the maintenance of the ancestors' presence through the continuity of physical reproduction. It is for this reason that in some African cultures, the first born child will be given the name of one of the ancestors in order for this child to incarnate these members of the clan.

One way of linking with the ancestors takes place when, through praise poetry, the living are linked with the dead and their activities are chained together in some form of long continuous chain of history. These praise poems may be categorised in what Vansina (1985:24) has called the "cumulative accounts." He says that these cumulative accounts "are accounts such as lists or genealogies which have to be continually updated" (1985:24). As Trevor Cope (1968:31) has observed, the main thrust of these praise-poems is for bringing "about conformity to the approved modes of behaviour." They are not merely meant to help "evaluate how far in the past something happened," but are directly relevant to the contemporary "social structures" (Vansina, 1985:24). In this way they play an important role in preserving and promoting the religio-ethical identity of African peoples. In the case of royalty, to be included in the list of previous rulers is to "prove continuity and to legitimate the institution of chieftainship" (Vansina, 1985:24). It is for this reason that, while in many praise poems the king may indirectly be challenged or even exposed to ridicule, the tendency is to protect the honour of the king and show that he has been better than his forebears. These oral performances have, of course, a historical dimension to them, but exaggerations and omissions serve the contemporary situation better than historical accuracy (1985:25).

Oral Hymns and Songs

Praise poems have been taken up in Christian oral tradition in southern Africa from the earliest period in hymns and songs. Ntsikana (c. 1780–1821) among the Xhosa was converted after hearing missionaries preach and set up his own autonomous congregations, leading worship and preaching in leopard skins. His striking oral

compositions, such as *Ntsikana's Bell* to summon worshipers, *Dalibom* in praise of God, utilize Xhosa cultural forms in a creative and moving way—indeed they were sung widely through southern Africa before they were ever printed. Jeff Opland's anthology, *Words that Circle Words* (1992:109–112), provides background and translations of the texts. Among them the beautiful *Great Hymn*:

He is the Great God, who is in heaven
 Thou art Thou, shield of truth.
 Thou art Thou, stronghold of truth.
 Thou art Thou, thicket of truth.
 Thou art Thou, who dwellest in the highest.
 He, who created life below, created life above.
 That creator who created, created heaven.
 That maker of the stars, and the Pleiades.
 A star flashed forth, it was telling us.
 Maker of the blind, does he not make them on purpose?
 The trumpet sounded, it has called us,
 As for his chase, he hunts for souls.
 He, who amalgamates flocks rejecting each other.
 He, the leader, who has led us.
 He, the great blanket, which we put on.
 Those hands of thine, they are wounded.
 Those feet of thine, they are wounded.
 Thy blood, why is it streaming?
 Thy blood, it was shed for us.
 This great price, have we called for it?
 This home of thine, have we called for it?

Christian symbolism of the wounds and blood of Christ on the cross are juxtaposed with the indigenous symbolism of protective shield, thicket and the great covering blanket.

A century later, Isaiah Shembe (1870–1935) who was marginally literate—he claimed never to have been schooled but to have learnt to read by a miracle (Gunner, 1986)—likewise draws on the *izibongo* or praise poem form to re-oralize or “re-member” (West, 1999) the gospel tradition in a new and liberating way. Among the praise poems recited concerning Shembe, this one by his early followers graphically contrasts the oral and the written gospel, as translated here by Elizabeth Gunner:

The Gospel which we saw setting the mountain on fire
 And preachers and evangelists denied it.
 They denied that we had just preached the gospel.
 They brandished their Testaments and Bibles in unison.
 They said “It is written thus.”
 Breaker-away, let us leave and let us head for our own Zululand,
 because he broke away with their Gospel,
 the Gospel which we saw approaching with our own royal leader

adorned with the (feathers of the red-winged) loerie.
 They gave out the decorations and held the sharp staves.⁶
 (Gunner, 2002:9).

Shembe's hymns combine the use of traditional Zulu diction and imagery with strong allusions to biblical material and western hymnic conventions in creative tension (see among other studies Gunner, 1986; Brown, 1999; Muller, 1999). The corpus of oral material from Shembe's Nazareth Baptist Church is extensive, including hymns, historical narratives, laws, testimonies and so on. It has occasioned considerable interest and has now mostly been published in text form. Similar bodies of oral tradition from African Initiated Churches, though perhaps not as rich, exist for other churches throughout Africa.

Proverbs

According to Mbiti, African proverbs are more than a "rich source of wisdom" and contain "religious beliefs, ideas, morals and warnings . . . and speak about God, the world, man, human relationships" (Mbiti, 1991:27). In oral cultures without a written legal code, proverbs serve as the repository of the cultural norms, ethical framework and legal wisdom of African societies. In Igbo society, for instance, proverbs convey custom or *omenala* which, through their links with the ancestors "really constitute the sacred customary laws of the Owerri Igbo" (Penfield, 1983:44). Conflicts and legal questions, both public and private are thus often settled by skilful use of proverbs in interaction with the context. Joyce Penfield argues that "African proverbs are the sacred texts of African traditional religion and thus are a paradigm for understanding the sacred tradition. In fact, they are significant means by which the sacred is conveyed and maintained in Igbo society . . . They do more than reflect the divine; they are the presence of the divine . . . we can consider African proverbs as sacred texts in praxis" (1997:2).

In many African cultures, women are particularly engaged in preserving and mediating proverbial wisdom, which enables them to challenge male patriarchal domination. Recently, a number of African women have drawn on proverbs to enable them to subvert the patriarchal nature of the Christian biblical tradition (e.g. Masenya, 1997). However, while many African proverbs stress the importance of women, others exude "derogatory" attitudes to women (Kolawole, 1997:62). So for example, while in the Shona language the woman as a mother could be elevated by proverbs like *Musha Mukadzi* (literally, a home is a woman), meaning that the family success and prosperity is dependent on the mother, another, *Mukadzi munaku kurega kuroya anoba* (if a beautiful woman is not a witch she is a thief), is demeaning about women (cf Kolawole, 1997:64). Other proverbs also encourage a work ethic concomitant with male privileges. A Shona saying like *Murume pasina vamwe* (he is only a man in the absence of real men), which encourages a particular masculinity associated with power, indirectly suggests that if someone is not a real man they are not fully human. The meaning of proverbs changes with context, though, which makes them flexible and powerful. While a proverb *Murume*

pasina vamwe could be used by males to demean other men, if used by women of a man, this becomes an unimaginable insult. A furore once broke in the Zimbabwean parliament when a female parliamentarian, Margret Dongo⁷, proverbially suggested that men who could not take President Mugabe head on are not real men.

Orality and the Occult

Names may be used in spells, so one's "real name" has power and esoteric significance and may be remembered only in the oral tradition of close family members. The name may also link the individual to specific ancestors and mediate protection and power. In the community, this also means that elders remain the deposit of key information, increasing their status and power in the community. Ezra Chitando (1998) has made a compelling analysis to show how names function in Zimbabwe among the Shona people to communicate history, belief, and message to relatives and neighbours. The same can also be observed among various African cultures in which before the advent of literary culture names served that function of providing socio-religious commentary (Chitando, 1998; Pongweni, 1983).

Besides this, religious tradition may be jealously guarded by ritual experts and disclosed only to an inner circle willing to undergo initiation after extensive training. Beyond their first initiation into their communities, Africans may continue on to further initiations into esoteric tradition, e.g. hunting societies or possession cults. Religious traditions may even be concealed from other religious experts, as diviners (*izangoma* in Zulu tradition) and traditional healers (*izinyanga* in Zulu tradition) are, to some extent, in competition with each other. While this preserves oral religious tradition, it also leads to multiple versions and variant performances.

Conclusion

As we have already noted, since there is no "master text" against which to measure current oral performances, the tradition can change imperceptibly in response to changed context while it is still experienced as in continuity with the past. What is no longer relevant to the community's lived experience and needs ceases to be spoken and so in time ceases to be known, while new traditions which prove to be of value come to be seen as ancient wisdom. This unconscious process of selection means that the corpus of African religio-cultural tradition and performance is dynamic and stable at the same time, responding to the concerns of the present as well as the past (Vansina, 1985). Oral religion in Africa has both fixed and fluid elements, so that it is possible to challenge someone for performing a ritual incorrectly and yet leave space for creativity and adaptation to new situations.

The ability to read among Africans does not replace the oral character of their religious practice, since even those who can read continue to perform and re-perform the religious tradition in orally mediated rituals and to consult ritual experts, such as diviners and herbalists, whose knowledge is secret and jealously guarded from the

uninitiated. The Bible and the Qur'an obviously influence many religious contexts, but sometimes play a largely iconic or even magical role. In the earlier periods, a large number of AIC members were illiterate. They could not read but they could preach and quote scripture as if they had memorised it from written text. Many would gain a profound knowledge of the Bible from sermons and public reading and could use it effectively, especially in prophecy, witness and preaching—ritual performances in which God was understood as speaking “unmediated” through the (“re-membered”) text.

In many of the religions of Africa, material representations of various kinds play a role in conjunction with oral performance: both cueing and supporting it. Rhythm, drumming, singing, movement, and dance on the part of the performer and the audience are also essential ingredients of most oral performances. They assist memory, maintain the link between the performer and the hearers and also provide opportunities for the unique contribution of the individual to the mediation of the tradition. In addition, this heightens religious experience and opens the way to experience of spirit and even to possession (e.g. by the ancestors).

The importance of the ancestors in African religious consciousness makes praise poems and lists of ancestors highly significant, not just to honor the living and connect them with their past, but also to enable invocation of the ancestors in religious rituals. The praise poem, at least in southern Africa, has been taken up extensively in African Initiated Churches—both in honouring God and in appropriating and re-composing the Bible in oral performance (as in Isaiah Shembe). The tradition of composition in performance, characteristic of the praise poem (see Opland, 1983), also continues in various ways in modern African oral religious tradition, bringing a vitality to African appropriations of Christian and Islamic tradition. In the absence of a written legal corpus, orally mediated proverbs often serve as a body of legal case law, which derives from the cosmological and religious narratives and traditions of African cultures. Adroit use of proverbs is widely admired and practiced. Finally, the esoteric nature of some African religious performances and traditions limit transmission of oral performance by religious experts.

Notes

- 1 African cultures have oral traditions which make it possible to engage in limited generalizations that should not be seen as valid for all African religions and cultures and as having only heuristic value.
- 2 Jan Vansina argues: “Oral tradition is both content and process. Any oral tradition is part of that process and its characteristics depend on its position in the process” (1985:3).
- 3 In *Trade and Market in the Early Empires* (1957), Karl Polanyi famously describes the way in which economic activity in the pre-modern era was subordinated to the norms, values and goals of the “moral universe” of particular cultures and posits a “double movement” of escape and recolonization that enables economic interests to subordinate ethical values in modern economies.
- 4 See the various accounts in Draper (2003).

- 5 Similar oral traditions associated with sacred sites abound in African thought, for example in the Hausa settlements around the Dalla hills at Kano in Nigeria, legitimated by stories of the spirits who abode there (Isoll, 2003:293).
- 6 Shembe encouraged the wearing of the Zulu head ring and skins and the bearing of traditional weapons by his male followers and traditional dress also for women. He constructed a special royal enclosure at the sacred mountain at Ekuphakameni for the Zulu king and gave one of his sisters as a bride to the king.
- 7 <http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Newsletters/zmno19.html> accessed on 14 January 2010.

CHAPTER 6

African Rituals

Laura S. Grillo

The Place of Ritual in African Religions

“Ritual” is as abstract and reified a notion as “religion,” and neither concept enjoys consensual definition. However focusing on what ritual *does*, rather than what it *is*, allows for greater appreciation of African ritual as the powerful and effective mode of religious expression that it is. African religions are pragmatic in focus and share the view that humans must vigilantly maintain harmonious relationships in both worldly and divine realms in order to prosper. Ritual is the means to negotiate a responsible relationship in the human community, with the ancestors, spirits, divinities, and cosmos. African rituals are reflexive strategies seeking practical ends: they establish identity, elicit revelation, access divinity to foster empowerment, and effect transformation.

Praxis in Space

The academic study of religion in western scholarship has made text its pre-eminent focus: sacred scripture and philology, mythic narrative and literary analysis, and philosophy articulated in discursive treatises. From this fundamental logocentrism, scholars defined “religion” in terms of orthodox propositions to which adherents subscribe. But the oral traditions of Africa are not orthodoxies, grounded in right expressions of belief, but rather orthopraxes, grounded in right action, especially ritual action.

African religions are not inscribed in canonical texts but lived in embodied experience. Convictions about the nature of divinity, the shape of the cosmos, and the situation of the person in it are conveyed through traditional practices and transmitted in ritual. Until relatively recently, however, ritual was peripheral to religious studies. Ronald Grimes dates the term “ritual studies” to 1977 when a Ritual Studies Consultation was inaugurated at the American Academy of Religions (AAR) annual meeting

(Grimes, 1995:xxv). Early studies of ritual were relegated to anthropologists who were prepared to encounter ritual directly in the field. The seemingly disparate practices were often cataloged as part of the “closed system” of so-called “primitive” traditions, those without sacred texts, mistakenly considered devoid of philosophy, and supposedly without soteriological import (Schwartz et al., 1975). Ironically such views were even maintained by early African interpreters of African religions, such as John Mbiti who asserted, “African religions must admit a defeat . . . they do not offer for mankind at large a way of ‘escape,’ a message of redemption . . . a rescue from the monster of death” (Mbiti, 1969:96–7).

Another distinguishing feature of the three “Abrahamic” faiths that eclipsed the importance of ritual and excluded African traditions from the purview of religious studies is the preoccupation with *time*. While the “religions of the book” chronicle human history as the locus of God’s will, African traditions instead privilege *space* as the medium of divine revelation. The natural world itself is the milieu where sacred and profane meet and work in constant concert.

An important example of the primacy of space is divination, a ritual pivot on which many African religious systems hinge. Whether it is reading signs and omens such as the pattern of a bird’s flight, or interpreting the random cast of cowrie shells, kola nuts, stones, or bones, divination seeks revelation and divine guidance in the spatial dimension. Diviners interpret seemingly random physical arrangements as messages from the spiritual realm.

Perhaps the most renowned form of African divination is *Ifa*, a tradition of the Yoruba of Nigeria. *Ifa* is classified as “wisdom divination,” a learned technique independent of the diviner’s charisms. *Ifa* diviners, called *Babalawo*, “Father of Secrets,” are highly trained ritual specialists. They interpret the visual patterns created by the random cast of kola nuts. This set of 256 possible signs, called *Odu*, or “signatures of *Ifa*,” comprises *Ifa*’s canon, fixing in concrete visual form a catalogue of the normative. While the verses associated with the signs are numberless and open to innovation, *Ifa*’s set of *Odu* is closed and unchanging, a *visual canon* (Grillo, 2008). The divinatory signs, encoding fundamental principles, ideals and norms of culture, blur the distinction between “texts” and “objects.”

False Dichotomies: Thought/Action, Myth/Ritual, Text/Objects

Most fundamentally, ritual is an *act*. Artificially distinguished from and subordinated to thought, ritual acts are often associated with mindless, rote, conditioned action, or assumed to recapitulate the timeless conventions of “tradition.” Such a sharply drawn dichotomy between thought and action can lead to a parallel but equally mistaken split of ritual from myth. African religious expression, however, defies this artificial divide.

While it is sometimes the case that ritual performances re-enact myth or sacred history, this is not ritual’s primary purpose. In fact, in African religions, concrete material forms (art and iconography) and the movement of objects and bodies in space (ritual action) transmit sophisticated ideas with considerable power, even without the embellishment of accompanying story or explication. Ritual and the associated plastic

arts are eloquent expressions in their own right and convey critical religious ideas with emotive force and dramatic effect. Moreover, the spectacular, performative and participatory nature of ritual creates experiences that instill them through bodily ways of knowing. The “visible, present, living substance” of the body brings immediacy and commitment to otherwise abstract religious ideas (Rappaport, 1999:146). The body, its actions, gestures and experiences mediate religious reflection.

Embodiment, Rhetoric, Performance, and Dynamics

The Body and Bodily Knowing in African Ritual

Because of the primacy of space, the body bears particular significance in African ritual both as the subject of practice and also the object towards which much of that action is directed. The body is permanently marked in initiatory ordeals such as scarification or circumcision. Bodies made thus distinct bear emblems of cultural identity and a visible insignia of the religious ideology that organizes both society and the individual moral life. Among the Yoruba the head is considered the seat of destiny and it receives particular attention during initiatory rituals when it is shaved, washed, smeared with kaolin clay. “Medicines” are introduced through small cuts in the scalp to invest the devotee with qualities, protection, or powers.

But the body is not just a *tabula rasa* or fixed, material entity upon which culture is inscribed. It is also itself a cultural phenomenon, resonating with the rich associations of the surrounding “life-world” (Devisch, 1993:1). Referring to Yaka culture (DR Congo), anthropologist René Devisch contends that ritual does not impose meaning but discloses and activates it; apprehension of meaning is sensuous and bodily. Ritual is an “organization of the sensorium” (1993:48). It orchestrates “tactile, olfactory, oral, sexual and interactional experiences . . . related to life-giving or life-promoting acts and exchange” (1993:133).

Thus, ritual is not just “symbolic.” It transforms practitioners, by eliciting direct bodily ways of knowing. As anthropologist Paul Stoller asserts, “The human body is not principally a text; rather, the sentient body is culturally consumed by a world filled with forces, smells, textures, sights, sounds and tastes . . .” (Stoller, 1995:7).

Through its multi-sensorial appeal, ritual arouses the senses, and also awakens affect—feelings and sensibilities—that lends to the assertions of religions an authority that can only be mediated through direct experience. “The symbols [of ritual] . . . are not only a set of cognitive classifications for ordering the . . . universe. They are also, and perhaps as importantly, a set of evocative devices for rousing, channeling, and domesticating powerful emotions” (Turner, 1969:42–3). Rituals in turn “recapture some of the charged values” of bodily experience and make them available for investment in performance (Fernandez, 1991:330).

Ritual enables participants *literally* to make *sense* of themselves and the world. Through its appeal to the *senses* and the *sensational* nature of the experience that it elicits, ritual reveals alternate realities and new modes of being.

Body, Medicine, and Healing Rituals

Medicine and religion are often deeply connected systems. Illness may be an inevitable fact of life, but its possible causes and cures are the subjects of competing cultural interpretations. In African religions, rituals of affliction and healing figure prominently. Because cosmic order and social harmony converge in bodily health, the occasion of illness is all the more alarming, for it is symptomatic of dis-ease in a more remote, invisible, yet inextricably related realm. Much ritual promoting healing focuses on fecundity. Gynecological illness and reproductive failure is not only a predicament for the patient, but a crisis for the community, since African religions aim at its renovation, not other-worldly salvation.

Isoma is one such curative ritual performed by the Ndembu of Zambia and documented by Victor Turner in his classic work *The Ritual Process*. In Ndembu language, “ritual” also means “obligation” and refers to the obligation to venerate the ancestor, especially in situations in which this neglect has “caught” a person in affliction or misfortune. “*Isoma*” means “to slip out of place or fastening,” a reference to miscarriage and also to forgetting one’s matrilineal kin, considered the protectors of fecundity (1969:15). The rites are said to “cause them to remember” their primary allegiance to the ancestors and the moral injunctions they inaugurated (1969:13). Medicines have symbolic properties; one is derived from the *mulendi* tree with a slippery surface, referring to pregnancies that have “slipped out” prematurely. The metaphor also has therapeutic value, suggesting the medicine lets the patient “slip out” of her condition of being “tied up” with infertility. The imagery of *Isoma* represents an example of ritual as “the play of tropes” (Fernandez, 1986). “What is made sensorily perceptible, in the form of a symbol, is thereby made accessible to the purposive action of society, operating through its religious specialists” (Turner, 1969:25).

The vitalizing resonance between a woman’s body and the cosmos is similarly played out in the *khita* healing cult among the Yaka (Devisch, 1993:xx). It aims to heal women’s reproductive ailments by activating the “primal womb” to which every woman is connected. This therapeutic ritual “focuses on the initiate’s life-bearing capacity in concert with the same capacity in the cosmos” (Devisch, 1993:213).

Ritual Masks and Masquerades as Embodied Rhetoric

An important example of the embodiment of religious thought in ritual is the mask and masquerades, a form of expression for which Africa is renowned. Many masks depict primordial beings, culture heroes, mythical ancestors and divinities whose significant precedents are re-enacted in performances. However, African masquerades do not generally recapitulate myths. Moreover many masks are not anthropomorphic figures at all, but complex superstructures representing the cosmic order or dynamics (Pernet, 1992). Their forms are predicated on cosmological ideas—such as the primacy of women’s blood as the source of embodied existence. An example is the *sirige* mask of the Dogon of Mali whose elongated zigzag design indicates the interwoven nature of the world, while its back and forth and swinging movements depict night and day and

the spiraling that set creation in motion. The masks' raffia skirts are dyed red to represent the blood of the perforated hymen and menses; Dogon consider these fibers to be the locus of potent and hence dangerous power.

Masks' formal, esthetic qualities convey fundamental values—such as “coolness,” representing mastery and containment of power. This is the case for the mask of the *Sande* secret society, a transnational and exclusively female masking tradition. Its sacred mask, *Sowei*, communicates the ideals of womanhood and female power through iconography. This helmet-style mask completely encompasses the head, and its smooth distended forehead is reminiscent of a swollen pregnant belly, the original “mask.” Its “cool,” stylized face with downcast eyes and small tight-lipped mouth, alludes to the power of discernment and discretion demanded of cultivated women. *Sowei*'s iconography also explicitly reveals both women and masks to have divine origin. The best pieces are supposedly sculpted by spirits in the underwater abode where “miracles of delicacy are the norm” (Boone, 1986:161). Among the mask's most striking features are the coils of flesh at the neck, representing the concentric rings of water formed as the original mask emerged. Neck coils are an ideal of female beauty and function like a halo in Christian art, signifying that women are human in form but divine in essence (Boone, 1986:170).

In African religions, revelation is made to be experienced. The invisible nature of divinity and the abstract quality of power must literally be *seen* to be believed. Towards this end, African masquerades function like mythology and other poetic forms: As British anthropologist Mary Douglas put it, rituals “enrich meaning [and] . . . call attention to other levels of existence” (Douglas, 1966:40). They point to a more significant realm and put participants into direct, unmediated contact with the “really real.” Masks' energetic activation in ritual performance arouses energy, accesses passion, and engages the spectator in song, dance, spectacle, and drama, causing the imagination to flicker with association. Masking's dynamic medium vividly appeals to its spectators to embrace the worldview that it depicts.

A Paradoxical Course

The rhetoric of ritual follows a paradoxical course; rather than offering forthright explanation, it proceeds by indirect means. For example, clients come to diviners with pressing need for guidance. But, rather than offering explicit answers, divination responds with an enigmatic image, a conjunction of symbols physically cast into new combination. The sign conveys bundles of meaning simultaneously—like visual poems (Grillo, 2008). Such ritual experiences reflect what James Fernandez calls “edification by puzzlement” (1980). They cause participants to enter the world of the imagination more deeply, to reflect on canonical images and experiences, and to draw from them insight about the human predicament. As Victor Turner asserted, “by indirections we seek out directions” (Turner, 1983:236). Rather than relating a story or offering explanation, ritual provides direct experience, “thick with sensory meaning” to awakens reflexive consciousness (Grimes, 1982:545).

Altars: Embodying the Immaterial

Sites of ritual communication with gods, ancestors, and spirits, altars are purposefully constructed to bring their presence into palpable focus. *Altars* may also be seen as visual poems referring to mythology about the gods through iconography. The symbolic coherence among objects on an altar unmistakably identify it with a particular deity, making it a potent place of revelation. Among the Yoruba, *altars* are referred to as the “face of the gods” (Thompson, 1993).

The “primacy of assemblage” is characteristic of African aesthetics (Blier, 1995). Characteristic foods, flags, colors associated with particular *orisha*, or deities, are clustered on the altar to invoke the divinity’s presence. An altar for *Shango*, god of thunder, would capture the flashing qualities of lightning and reflect his boldness and spirit of righteous vengeance; his colors are red and white and his characteristic double-headed axe must always appear. An altar for *Oshun* conveys the gentleness and sensuality of this water goddess. Honey colors and offerings like pineapple represent the sweet water of the river, her natural domain.

In Kongo civilizations of Central Africa, the locus of an altar may be permanent or fleeting, natural or constructed, but each is considered “a ‘turning point,’ the cross-roads, the threshold to another world” (Thompson, 1995:50). The *nganga*, a ritual healer, can become a living altar through possession trance; the “ecstatic trembling of the shoulders, called *mayembo*, is our best measure of where to look for ‘altars’ among Bakongo . . . When the *nganga* trembles . . . he becomes an altar” (Thompson, 1993:48). Another form of altar is the tomb where ancestors are entreated through ritual offerings, libation and incantation. Tying flashing objects like mirrors, plates, or glass, to branches fixed in the ground at gravesites captures spirits so their energy can be channeled towards the living. Kongo cosmograms (*dikenga*, “the turning”) are cross-in-a-circle patterns representing the circling of the soul through intersecting worlds of living and dead. Cosmograms drawn on tombs invoke God and the ancestors. Their inscription is itself ritual and includes singing and circling this “point” of convergence.

Performance: Activating Energies

While artifacts (like altars) and other symbols are part of the basic apparatus of ritual, they are important only insofar as they evoke gesture, since what is essential to the ritual process is its dynamic quality. Ritual is performative, designed as spectacle as well as participatory engagement. Ritual is the means to activate the energies of the gods, spirits, or ancestors, and unleash their transformative power.

Multi-sensorial and Polysemic Performances

Masquerades, for example, bring sculpture and textile into exciting dynamic conjunction with the performative arts of dance, music and theatre. Masking vividly illustrates

ritual's multi-sensorial, polysemic, nature. An African mask is not a static emblem, not just the covering of face or head, nor the costume of the wearer or the dance. All these elements operate in dynamic conjunction.

Moreover, together they convey many layers of meaning simultaneously. For example, the Dogon *Satimbe* mask whose superstructure is a woman with upraised arms bears different meanings, depending on the level of the viewer's initiation; it can represent the female ancestor who discovered the first "mask," its fibres red with powerful menstrual blood; *Yasigi*, the twin and intended mate of the rebellious primordial being, Ogo, who tore away from God's womb and forever searches for her; *Yasigine*, the sole woman initiated into the masking society. The mask's various symbolic allusions cannot be articulated efficiently in discursive form, but are effectively captured and economically conveyed in ritual performance.

Ritual Activation of Power Objects

Art and artifacts are primary means through which African religious ideas are communicated and transmitted. Sculpture, masks, divinatory iconography and paraphernalia, priestly accoutrements, as well as protective charms and amulets all "represent, channel or transform spiritual energies or beings" (Hackett, 1996:3). Not only do such art forms convey meaning and evoke an aesthetic experience, they also have efficacy. Some power objects (such as charms, amulets, statuettes, stools, or even medicines) are not mere epiphenomena of ritual; they are perceived to have agency as "spirit-embodiment and spirit-directing" forces themselves (Thompson, 1983:117).

An important example is the figurine used in Vodun traditions in Benin and Togo, designated by the Fon term *bocio*, literally meaning "empowered (*bo*) cadaver (*cio*)" (Blier, 1995:2). These figures intentionally display what art historian Suzanne Blier calls "counteraesthetics," lacking the formal qualities of Fon beauty—"youthful grace, surface polish, a sense of finish or exacting anatomical detail" (1995:30). Instead they are striking in their ugliness, evoking shock and fear, which boosts their potency. Raffia cords and binding are prominent features of *bocio*. This wrapping alludes to binding of powerful energies to be harnessed and directed towards the protection of the object's owner, and also to coercive strength and tenacity. The objects are further activated through "assemblage," the addition of medicines or accessories layered on the figurine. (Hackett, 1996:46). They are further energized with saliva (through incantation or spitting), heat (applying fire, pepper, alcohol), knotting/twisting, and sacrificial offering (Blier, 1995:74). These actions relate to senses beyond sight, namely hearing, touch, and taste, emphasizing the animated power of the activated object.

Kongolese statuettes (*nkisi konde*) are similarly activated, pierced with nails and metal shards to trigger the forces they embody and the medicines they contain. Their menacing stance, with raised arm or protruding tongue, reflects their purpose, to punish or inflict harm (Hackett, 1996:50). The *nkisi* is also considered a "medicine of God," that can serve to heal or protect (Thompson, 1995:50).

Possession Trance: The Gods in Ritual Action

Perhaps the most dramatic example of the body as the locus of ritual experience and expression is possession trance, a widespread phenomenon in African religions. Indigenous explication of possession trance grants agency to spirits and divinities who displace the persona of the devotee to become an embodied presence in the living community.

The phenomenon is commonly referred to in local idioms as “mounting,” bearing both connotations of riding a horse and sexual possession, for the spirit is said to mount the head and ride the devotee, and the two are fused into one being. In the Vodou (Vodun) traditions of Benin and Togo the possessed are called “horsemen” of the gods. Possession is “a mode of knowing in which knower and known conjoin” (Grimes, 1982:548).

Possession trance is not indicative of evil, but is beneficent and ritually invoked. It is spectacle and revelation. Devotees recognize archetypal gestures and behaviors as indications of the presence of particular spirits and divinities among them. Therefore, the trance is subject to the constraints of cultural convention and constituted by formalism. Performances must be competently executed to be persuasive, yet paradoxically “authentic” possession trance precludes the performer as self-conscious agent directing the ritual action. Anthropologist Paul Stoller resolves this epistemological dilemma by suggesting that the bodily practice of possession reflects habituated cultural memory. Culturally appropriate postures, gestures, expressions and movements are literally *incorporated* in the performer and constitute “the embodied substrate of performance” (Stoller, 1995:29). In Songhay spirit possession in the Republic of Niger, the bodily senses attract disembodied entities: “spirits must be enticed to their social bodies through music (sound), praise-poetry (sound), specific perfumes (smell), and dance (movement)” (Stoller, 1995:22).

Possession in turn confers special embodied knowledge. During the *Dipri* festival among the Abidji of Côte d’Ivoire, participants who surrender to the spirit of the river stab themselves at the peak of the possession trance and are able to be instantaneously healed; consequently they acquire healing powers. Adepts perform extraordinary feats such as cutting off one’s own tongue and restoring it unharmed (Grillo, forthcoming). Thus possession is an exercise in empowerment in which “possessed becomes possessor” (Schmoll in Stoller, 1995:25).

Ritual Dynamics: Movement of Bodies in Space

In his seminal and still classic work, *The Rites of Passage* (1908), Arnold van Gennep offered insights into ritual as both a social and ontological transition. Giving special attention to the logic of movements in space, van Gennep noticed that ritual actors change location in order to designate change in social identity, and concluded that the critical distinguishing feature of a rite of passage is an actual territorial passage. Ritual participants are first spatially separated from society, and after undergoing symbolic ordeal in a liminal space, cross an actual threshold to re-emerge as new persons and

reintegrate. Thus rites of passage literally move participants through “planes of classification” (Turner, 1969:41).

Initiation is the classic example. Among Chokwe and related peoples of central Africa (Angola, DR Congo, Zambia) initiation requires a period of seclusion lasting up to more than a year for boys and four months for girls. The spatial separation marks neophytes’ symbolic death. During this period they are socially unclassifiable, neither children nor adults, suspended in a liminal condition “betwixt and between,” until they are ritually “reborn” and returned to society as cultivated adults (Jordán, 1999).

The installation of a new king involves a similar dynamic. The process for making a Yoruba Ondo king (*Oba*) begins with a “symbolic death and rebirth represented by his [three-month] seclusion and reappearance,” immediately followed by a pilgrimage to the Ondo’s place of origin for an essential rite of blessing and protection (Olupona, 1991:62). His return inaugurates his kingship.

Van Gennep’s clear analysis of the pronounced significance of spatial transition made a critical contribution to understanding how ritual “works.” Movement enables participants to experience the sacred not as a fixed point or an ultimate reality, but as that which is categorically distinct and socially (and therefore physically) “set apart.”

This is true of ritual itself. Ritual doesn’t merely point to what is sacred nor does it simply impose a new social state. Rather, it causes the participant to struggle through an ontological change. Ritual is always “contingent, provisional, and defined by difference” (Bell, 1992:91). Far from mindless repetition, African ritual engages participants in a reflexive process that calls for attention and evokes response.

Ritual Reflexivity, Agency, and Ethics

Expanding on van Gennep’s ideas, Victor Turner underscored that the central, liminal experience “mak[es] neophytes vividly and rapidly aware of the ‘factors of their culture’,” he qualified liminality itself as a “stage of reflection” (Turner, 1967:108). Ritual as pedagogy teaches “neophytes *how to think with some degree of abstraction* about their cultural milieu and gives them ultimate standards of reference” (Turner, 1967:108—emphasis mine).

Chokwe male initiation (*mukanda*) employs masked performances that “‘bring to life’ concepts of ancestral influence” (Jordán, 1999:34). Further initiation into the secret masking association, *mungonge*, subjects initiates to “physically trying and psychologically challenging conditions to prove their courage and moral fortitude” (Jordán, 1999:34). What is most essential to initiation is the “slow transformation of the individual, as a progressive passage from exteriority to interiority. It allows the human being to gain consciousness of his humanity” (Zahan, 1979:54). This inward passage forges self-conscious awareness.

Reflexivity is integral to the ritual experience. Not only are ritual participants capable of reflection on the action in which they are deeply engaged, they self-consciously negotiate and revise ritual traditions as they engage in them. Moreover they are aware of how ritual actions shape them. Therefore the “reflexive monitoring of performance by the performers” is a critical ingredient of all varieties of African rituals (Drewal, M.T.,

1988:27). For example, contrary to persistent Western ideas about the nature of ritual masking, wearing a mask is neither a chaotic nor cathartic experience, but involves a self-consciously controlled performance, a sign of reflexivity (Pernet, 1992).

Only to the extent that ritual actors evince reflexivity can they be considered to be agents, not mere actors mechanically rehearsing prescribed routine in unchanging ways. Agency implies causal influence as well as conscious and deliberate action toward a desired end.

This end is always pragmatic. "Rituals are deeds" (Grimes, 1982:545). Efficacy is a common refrain, among theorists and practitioners alike. Ritual "works" insofar as it effects transformation. So critical is transformation to the process and outcome of ritual performance that Richard Schechner coined for it the term "transformance" (Schechner, 1977:71 quoted by Grimes, 1982:543). Initiation makes a boy into a man, a girl into a woman; divination is a strategy for coping with crisis, suggesting concrete possibilities for action; sacrifice forges contracts by which adherents live and thrive. Ritual effects real physical change, social transitions as well as psychological and spiritual transformation. As Walter Burkert says, ritual "can only fulfill its communicatory function if it avails itself of a pragmatism that is unquestionably real" (Burkert, 1983:42).

However, "participants probably experience the failure of ritual as often as they do the success of it" (Grimes, 1996:284). Grimes claims that within the "closed system" of ritual, participants will more often than not "blame themselves before impugning the rite and will criticize some part of it before challenging the whole of it" (1996:291). This is because agency is not attributed exclusively to individual ritual actors; rituals themselves are accorded agency. Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw (1994) take the extreme position that "'ritual commitment' . . . consists precisely in abandoning agency altogether," trusting it to ritual instead (Sax, 2008:478). African divination is a key ritual where this strong claim can be contested (Grillo, 2009).

Agency within Divination

At the heart of African religious tradition, divination is unique in its focus on personal agency. Unlike most rituals, either fixed by liturgical calendar or mandated by the community, divination is instigated by the individual. While there may be occasions of public divination, such as a trial for witchcraft, these instances are rare. More typically, a troubled individual seeks the services of the diviner to attend to personal concerns. As a private and voluntary affair, divination involves deliberate and strategic action, not a rote enactment. The consulter is an agent, self-aware and willfully imposing choice (including the choice of diviner), not just an unconscious actor rehearsing a pre-scripted routine.

Anthropologist Michael Jackson underscores agency in divination, identifying it first and foremost as a "ritual means of making a choice" (1989:63). Diagnosing a client's problem or affliction in terms of spiritual malady, the diviner's aim is to determine what sacrifice will appease the entities responsible, rectify the situation, and alleviate suffering. Working among the Kuranko in Sierra Leone, Jackson notes that the diviner "defines his task as one of 'seeing a sacrifice'" (1989:59). This culminating prescription

for sacrifice enables the client to take decisive action in an otherwise ambiguous situation and move from a state of “inertia to purposeful activity” (1989:60). However, the client alone decides whether to perform the sacrifice.

Divination offers a foundation for ethics, for only agents can intentionally exercise the free will and conscious choice necessary to advance “the good.”

Sacrifice as Ethical Engagement

Sacrifice can take many forms in African religions: private altar offerings, alms, adherence to the privations of dietary injunctions, or subjection to the ordeals of initiation. However, blood sacrifice is the archetypal model. In African religions, blood sacrifice shows life's dependence on death and establishes the reciprocal bond between spiritual and mortal realms.

A central tenet of Vodou is the concept of *hun*, the vital force active in God, heart, blood, drums and bellows alike. “Like the circulation of blood and the beating of the heart (which is simulated in the drum and bellows), *hun* is seen to be essential to human life and vitality” (Blier, 1995:82). In Vodou, blood sacrifice is therefore a focal point for many rituals, from the activation of altars to ceremonies recalling to life initiates ritually considered “dead” (Blier, 1995).

In African religions the life force released through blood sacrifice “feeds” the gods and the “living dead” (ancestors) even as it channels their animating energy to the human community. A devotee must not forsake the ritual duties that sustain this relationship, for divinities and ancestors, while supportive, are also demanding and can trouble a negligent supplicant by causing illness or chronic misfortune (Grillo, 1999). In this way the ancestors, especially, are referred to as the “guardians of the moral order.” Reciprocity, at the heart of sacrificial exchange, sustains this order, making sacrifice an essentially ethical act.

Sacrifice, often a mute enactment, is an eloquent rhetorical device and powerful act, self-consciously wrought, to elicit “the good” for oneself in concert with community and divinity.

Gender and Power

If African ritual is overly characterized as conservative, it is also predominantly represented as an enclave of male activity that serves to reinforce male privilege and power. It is true that, given the disproportionate generative power of women—their ability to bring forth life—African traditions symbolically restore a balance between domains of production and reproduction by excluding women from certain creative enterprises, notably ironworking and carving. However, in West Africa especially women exercise considerable power that ritual features in high relief. Much African ritual confers women's innate power upon other authorities.

In West Africa both the rituals of male initiation and the investiture of kings make strong symbolic associations between the male subjects and woman, inculcating and making them embody traits of femininity. In the nineteenth century state of Ségou (in

present day Mali), a king would wear female attire, comport himself with humility characteristic of ideal womanhood, and was referred to as “woman-king.” In an extreme instance of gender conflation, a future Traoré king of the Bambara was actually castrated. Physically divesting him of maleness enabled him to acquire female virtues and bear the sexual duality necessary to exercise the power of this office (Adler, 2007:81–4). The institution of the “woman-king” endured until at least 1958 when such persons served in more modest capacities as judges and mediators, while still wielding strong moral authority (Adler, 2007:83).

Female moral authority and power is a critical underpinning of contemporary kingship among the Ondo Yoruba of Nigeria. The king traces his mythic descent from *Pupupu*, the female ancestor who was “accorded the rank of a Yoruba king” (Olupona, 1991:26). Women still command both spiritual power and political influence. “The paramount female chief is *Lobun*, the most revered title in Ondo and also referred to as *Oba Obinrin* (woman king)” (1991:47).

Twinship, Sexual Ambiguity, and Power

A widespread African ideal is the complementarity between men and women, and the powerful unity of male and female qualities. Male/female twins are ideal and figure widely in myth and ritual as progenitors of humanity. The cosmogonic myth of the Dogon of Mali, for example, relates that the primordial beings were eight sets of androgynous twins eventually paired into couples. Mawu-Lisa, the Fon creator god is simultaneously male and female; and the Yoruba represent the “living dead,” the ancestors who are guardians of the moral order, as twin statuettes (*ere ibeji*). Yoruba twin memorial figures representing deceased children (*ibedji*) receive nurturing ritual attention. “They may be washed, oiled, rubbed with various substances . . . adorned with jewelry, clothes . . . and amulets. Many of these figures develop a fine patina with constant use” (Hackett, 1996:41). Human twins are considered to have the powers of the *orisha*; while they herald wealth, they may bring misfortune if not properly honored (Hackett, 1996:178). The Senufo of Côte d’Ivoire reflect similar views, deeming twins to have closer affiliation with spirits than humans (Hackett, 1996:123).

Doubleness, being powerful, is also perceived as dangerous. Feared as well as revealed, it must be ritually managed. Viewing twinship as aberration and threat to the natural order, the Igbo of Nigeria traditionally left twins to die in the bush; their birth incurs pollution removed by purification rites, *Ikpú alu*, involving dragging a sacrificial victim over persons and places in contact with the pollution (Ikenga-Metuh, 1985:5). In some African traditions, such as the Dogon, in order to maximize fecundity and ensure reproduction, all remnants of androgyny inherent in the body must be excised. Circumcision and clitoridectomy are performed to make male and female sexually distinct.

Ritual Classification of Gender: Female Genital Mutilation

Clitoridectomy is still a common rite of female initiation in some regions of Africa. This surgical removal of the clitoris and parts of the labia minora is far more radical and

dangerous than male circumcision, yet both widespread practices of genital modification are understood to be important means by which gender is culturally defined. Such is the case within the Sande secret society among the Mende of Sierra Leone. Even while the Sande mask reveres inherent female power, Sande's indispensable initiatory act is clitoridectomy.

Infibulation, the most radical form of female genital cutting, involves excising the external genitalia including the labia majora and suturing the vulva. Performed mostly in the Horn of Africa, it is understood to constrain female sexual desire and preserve chastity. Among the Hofriyati of northern Sudan, infibulation is intended to fashion women into "living vessels" of the culture's moral values, making their bodies pure, clean, smooth, and enclosed (Boddy, 1989:16). Moreover, girls "actively achieve their gender identities through the directed experience of [the] trauma" of the ritual operations (Boddy, 1989:58).

From the perspective of those who condone it, the painful ordeal establishes strong female ties in patriarchal and virilocal societies, where women must rely on mutual support. Opponents, including The World Health Organization (WHO), label the practices as female genital mutilation (FGM). Recognizing the extreme physical injury, dangerous, and painful health ramifications, and immense psychological trauma caused by these procedures, the WHO considers FGM a violation of human rights. In the last twenty years, international campaigns to eliminate FGM resulted in official bans in eighteen African countries (*Economist*, 2010).

Personhood, Witchcraft, and Ritual

In traditional Africa, the person is constituted by a material body, a soul or "shade," and also a spiritual "double," the vital force. In some societies, the presence of an additional psychic or spiritual substance constitutes the unnatural essence of a witch. In others, "the witch is an incomplete being, the only who possesses no *dya* (double). The witch . . . in search for his double, struggles to capture that of his victims" (Thomas and Luneu, 1980:80, translation mine). Witches kill, particularly kin, by feeding on the vital force. Lacking the natural doubleness essential to personhood, the witch is the antithesis of the person, and subverts the moral order.

Witchcraft is deeply embedded in African traditional systems of belief and practice and remains formidably ensconced in daily consciousness even in the contemporary urban situation. It is conceived to be a very real, prevalent and menacing force. The perceived need for protection from witchcraft is a decidedly compelling factor in seeking refuge in traditional rituals such as divination and its prescriptions for purification, sacrifice, protective amulets, and herbal remedies.

Because witchcraft is a key construct in African moral systems, early functionalists viewed belief in these malevolent forces as an explanatory framework for brutal misfortune, especially unaccountable death; it was a socially pragmatic means to promote the vigilant preservation of customs and mores. In former times in Dida and Bété societies of Côte d'Ivoire, a suspected witch was subjected to trials by ordeal, made to take

poison whose effect would prove guilt or innocence. Today accusations are tried in the judicial system that punishes witchcraft with imprisonment.

Classic anthropology tended to oppose witches, as agents of evil, with diviners, healers and priests, as forces for good. Witches operate in the shadows of night, invisible and anonymous to the community, to attack and kill; their opponents are known and esteemed, their practices are overt and serve community. However, indigenous terms suggest the emic notion that all engage the same occult power. Only the choice to use it for beneficial or malevolent ends is determinative. The Yoruba *Gelede* festival, a lavish masquerade that venerates the “Great Mothers,” exemplifies this fearsome ambiguity. These elderly women are revered as progenitors but also considered witches. Yet “no one would address a woman suspected of possessing such a power as *aje* [‘witch’] not just out of fear but because such women also work positive wonders” (Drewal and Drewal, 1983:9). The two masks of the Great Mother both reflect her doubleness: the bearded woman (*iyánlá*) or Bird of the Night (*Eye Oro*). The bearded woman, the epitome of sexual ambiguity, represents extraordinary spiritual power that cannot be contained within the domain of a single gender. The bird represents witches’ nocturnal transformation and also suggests the witch, like nature, can be both generous and cruel. Its red beak is stained with blood, which contains *ase*, power or life force. *Gelede*’s purpose is to honor the Mothers’ power and press it into the service of the wellbeing of society.

With its radical opposition of good and evil, fundamentalist forms of Christianity foster belief in witchcraft as their satanic counterpart. Fear of witchcraft has proved a powerful evangelizing force. In the last decade the evangelical Christian churches and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal conducting anti-witchcraft vigils have thrived; congregations rapidly multiplied and grew to astonishing proportions. Taking seriously speculation about the occult power behind money and ambivalence about wealth, the Pentecostal Church gained popularity by emphasizing the attainment of prosperity through Godly means (Moore and Saunders, 2001:16).

Far from a reflection of primitive or pre-logical thinking, as presented by early theorists such as Lévy-Bruhl, the notion of witchcraft is “dynamic and engaged with the world and is, for this reason eminently modern” (Moore and Sanders, 2001:10). Contemporary anthropologists read the phenomenon as an integral feature of modernity and the postcolonial situation. Jean and John Comaroff (1993) view the resilience of witchcraft beliefs and increasing recourse to them as local responses to the pressures of imperialism and capitalism. Peter Geschiere ascribes their resurgence in Cameroon to the destabilizing impact of globalization; among the Maka of Cameroon it was “hardly possible to talk about power without referring to the *djembe* (sorcery/witchcraft)” (Geschiere, 1997:2). Discourse about power relations in politics are permeated by reference to witchcraft, since both are ambiguous forces.

Innovation and Adaptation: Ritual and History

Ritual acts are often erroneously held to be invariable, and African ritual in particular is made synonymous with ancient practices, fossilized and unchanged by history. Yet

just as history is often ritualized in commemorative ceremonies and rites reassert social charters, ritualization also reshapes history. Performance-dependent rituals, like divination and curing rites, with less certain outcomes than status-marking ceremonies are inherently less stable. As they proliferate and compete, they are enmeshed in the historical change that they reflect (Barnes, 1990:264). Performance theorist Richard Schechner underscores “the startling ability of human beings to create themselves, to change, to become—for better or for worse—what they ordinarily are not,” through ritual (Schechner, 1995:1, cited in Brady, 1999:243).

Even when it draws on indigenous legacy, “traditional” ritual is not static. One striking example is *Mami Wata*. The association of bodies of water with goddesses is ubiquitous along the Gulf of Guinea, but *Mami Wata* is a relatively new instantiation. She is an African water goddess in the composite image of an “Indian” snake-charmer (based on a nineteenth-century chromolithograph circulated as publicity for a German carnival performance and imported to the African Coast by merchants), and a mermaid (featured as figurehead on the bows of European ships). Her shrines extend across Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria. She is a “wholly modern spirit embodying hybridity . . . and constant innovation”, the product of global communication and exchange (Drewal, 2008:9).

Especially when taken outside their traditional, “authorized” contexts, “traditional” rituals still bear persuasive power and can moreover “make history” (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993:xviii). Globalization and rapid technological change have not rendered religion irrelevant anywhere in the world, including Africa. African ritual continues to draw on and revitalize traditions in response to new historical realities.

Traditional ritual appeals to female genital power in Côte d'Ivoire is one example. As the source of life, woman has the power to launch fearsome curses as well as elicit the strongest of ethical mandates. When a village is endangered by an epidemic or other calamity, the Abidji perform *Sokroyibé*, a nocturnal rite in which women deploy their genital power to neutralize witchcraft and call down protection. Female elders strip naked and cross the village, pounding the ground with old pestles, singing and cursing witches. To entrap them and their spells, they sprinkle the village with water in which they've bathed their genitals (Grillo, forthcoming). In Côte d'Ivoire, as elsewhere in West Africa, women are aware of their genital power and “actually use this power, or the threat of it, in desperate political situations” (Stevens, 2006:595). In December 1949 approximately 2,000 Ivoirian women made the now much-celebrated thirty-mile march from Abidjan to a prison in Grand Bassam to demonstrate against French colonial administrators' incarceration of political leaders. The women stripped naked, danced using gestures that the French deemed obscene, and sang until they were forcibly dispersed. More recently, at the outbreak of civil war in Côte d'Ivoire in 2002, Nanan Kolia Tano, a 65-year-old female Baule chief, organized the *Adjanou* dance, a ritual appeal to female genital power. Women elders danced naked for seven days until rebel soldiers stormed the village, kidnapped and killed them. Only Nanan Kolia Tano escaped (Djinko, 2003). The continuity of ritual coupled with its application in novel situations shows it to be far from a relic, but a self-conscious strategy that comments on and effects the contemporary social situation.

CHAPTER 7

Postcolonial Feminist Perspectives on African Religions

Musa W. Dube

Introduction

African Indigenous Religions are unique since they largely have no written scriptures,¹ no images of the diety/god,² no missionary tendencies, no temples, no founding heroes (Amanze, 2000:45–6) and very few shrines and divinities. This almost absolute lack of physical and conventional representations of the Divine first led some missionaries to conclude that African people had no concept of the Divine. Conversely, in Botswana, when one of the first churches were built, there was open protest as people held that “it was wrong for God (Modimo) to have a house in town and they wanted it (the church building) pulled down and to expel Christians . . . At the meeting several speakers repeated the complaint that Christianity, and especially the church building, was the cause of drought . . . for there is no God (Modimo) for whom a house has to be built.” (Schapera 1971:19; Ntloedibe, 2001:83). Physical representations of the Divine, in other words, were not only absent, they were unwanted and were a theological violation of what people understood about the Divine.

Be that as it may, one is likely to hear scholars and researchers saying Africans are incurably religious. This means that for most Africans the presence of the Divine is obvious. Therefore the sacred vis-a-vis the secular realm does not exist. There are no choices about deciding to believe or not believe. There is just life, creation, people, and the Living Dead (Ancestors);³ and God/Deity is in all of them all the time. One is born into African Indigenous Religion(s) by being born into the African communities. The two are synonymous so much so that the subject of the Divine presence is not a subject of debate and contemplation. God is Life. The Divine is everywhere and in everything.

The structure of African Indigenous Religion(s) may be said to consist of the community in creation, the Living Dead and God. Some variations of this structure exist since in some regions, especially in West Africa, there is the Community, Ancestors, Gods and Goddesses, and then God/Diety. In other regions, there is the underground,

which consists of the Living Dead (Ancestors) and some other unhappy or dangerous spirits. The community is the body of African Indigenous Religious thinking. Religious heroes or founders are few, if any, because the Divine is represented by the community of the Living Dead (the Ancestors), who continue to take active interest in the wellbeing of their survivors. Similarly, the scriptures and ethics of living are found within the community values and cultures—which make clear what is expected in every relationship; between children and their parents; between siblings; between spouses; between relatives, neighbors; the land; and between the Living Dead and the Creator, God/Diety.

The ethics and values of relationships are taught and maintained through role models, proverbs, myths, taboos, laws, songs, myths/legends, ceremonies, and rituals, that continue to underline what is expected as normal and acceptable (Oduyoye, 1995:1–43, 79–131). In this chapter, I wish to contribute to the ever growing studies in African Indigenous Religions (AIRs) by doing a gender analysis of God, the Ancestors/Living Dead, Intermediaries, and Ethics of African Indigenous Religions, using examples from Southern Africa. I will only occasionally refer to West Africa in so far as its structure is different, and here perhaps than in other regions, one finds some physical representations of divinities (Oduyoye, 1995). Before I start, it is important that I should briefly address the methodological issues and complications in AIR(s), which are related to both gender and postcoloniality.

Problematizing of Frameworks of AIR(s)

The first point to note on methodological issues and complications in AIR(s) is that, given that they are synonymous with various African communities, it goes without saying that they are also culturally different depending on the various ethnic groups, regions, and languages. African communities within each country tend to have different languages and ethnic groups, so much so that one cannot speak of a uniform type African Indigenous Religion(s) without violating the very identity of Africans. That is, people are unlikely to call themselves Africans. They are likely to identify themselves as the Zulu, Sotho, Tswana, Ndebele, Asante, Akan, Yoruba, Igbo, Kikuyu, Sukuma, etc. Indeed even the national identification of saying “I am Ghananian, Nigerian, Zimbabwean, Malawian, or South African” is a relatively new identity that can be given 50–60 years following the wars of liberation. National identity, however, was a constructed identity of resistance which came with the struggle for independence, and was constructed by people who found themselves within colonially drawn boundaries and rule. The colonized increasingly built coalitions of resistance, assuming national identities where they did not culturally exist for the common end; namely, liberation purposes.

While these national identities worked for the liberation struggle, they often depended on suppressing ethnic and gender differences (Dube, 2000). In the post-independence era, this suppression irrupted as violent ethnic wars that have characterized many African countries, claiming millions of lives. In short, an identity that black African people of the continent will gladly accept for themselves is one that identifies them around their ethnic groups. Similarly, their religious beliefs will be constructed more around their ethnic groups—which are culturally diverse and different. Thus

AIR(s) can somewhat be said to be as diverse as its ethnic cultures and languages. Given this complexity, some scholars prefer to speak of AIR(s), that is, in the plural, others insist on African Indigenous Religion, that is, in the singular. I cannot by any chance claim to speak for African Indigenous Religion(s) in any depth, save to give a perspective. My attempt to speak with some particularity in this paper is to as much as possible focus on Southern African examples, drawn specifically from Bantu people—where I come from.

Decolonizing the Category of African Indigenous Religion(s)

The second point to note on complications of methodology relates to the naming of African Indigenous Religion(s). The latter is not a name that African people would nomally appropriate for themselves to express their religious belief (Mndende, 1996; Oduyoye, 1995). At best, the Bantu speakers would define their beliefs as *Setho*, *Isintu*, *Chithu* etc. The closet translation I can give to this word would be the act of living humanly with other people. It is the capacity to live responsibly and respectfully with and among other people. *Vision 2016* gives one of the most beautiful description of *botho* as “a process for earning respect by first giving it, and to gain empowerment by empowering others . . . and encourages social justice for all” (Vision 2016, 1996:2). *Botho/Ubuntu/Tjithu* is often used to distinguish the practice of living in community according to other foreign beliefs, values, and concepts, such as Christian, Western, Islamic, and Hindu. The term African Indigenous Religion(s) is, therefore, best understood as a category imposed from outside—either by anthropologists or some western trained African scholars of religion. Even among the latter we find variations: one group prefers to use African Religions; another uses African Religion, the other uses African Traditional Religions while yet others prefer African Indigenous Religions.⁴ The choice of which term should be adopted remains unresolved; hence different scholars go with their own preference.

Decolonizing AIR(s) Framework

Third, speaking of AIR(s) is further complicated by the paradigms, the ideologies, and the scholars who have recorded them in the past 100 years for us. First, due to lack of distinction between the sacred and the secular in African cultures, AIR(s) are often categorized under anthropology or sociological studies. Second, anthropological studies were carried out during colonial times by missionaries, traders, and scholars, whose ideology of domination colored what they saw, what they recorded, how they recorded it, and why they recorded it. Anthropology was the right arm of the colonizing ideology. To read anthropological records is to drink in the well of eurocentricism, racism, and colonialism. It is to read a nightmare. Most African scholars are still very hesitant to read anthropological studies, for as Ife Amadiume (1997:2) rightly points out, “The subject of anthropology was, therefore, racist from the beginning and was not intended to serve an African interest. Rather, it was intended to humiliate and insult Africans by

classifying them as primitive savage ‘Them/Other’ to the civilized European ‘We’.” Amadiume acknowledges, however, that, “In this, we face a dilemma because, unfortunately, a lot of the archival information that Africans need . . . is trapped in this subject.”

Fourth, beyond the anthropological records African scholars of religion came around and began to document African religions for themselves, but most of these were Christian scholars—educated and trained in missionary and Christian education. A good example is John Mbiti who was trained as a New Testament scholar and ordained as an Anglican Priest. Mbiti is undoubtedly more known for his work in AIR(s) than in New Testament. The work of these scholars was some form of resistance to the colonial missionaries’ outright rejection of AIR(s). Yet it subscribed to the colonial missionary ideology which regarded AIR(s) and all other religions and cultures as a God-given “*praeparatio evangelica*” (see Ntloedibe-Kuswani, 2001:97–120). That is, like the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, all other religions and cultures were insufficient or short of revelation, but they were there for the purposes of fulfilling or implanting the Christian gospel. As I read through some of the earlier anthologies of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians and their views on AIR(s), I realize just how many of them worked squarely with this framework (See Oduyoye and Musimbi, 1992; Musimbi and Njoroge, 1996). The African women writers in the above collections repeatedly see misogyny of African Indigenous Religions as something that can be redeemed by the Christian gospel. Oppressed African women can be liberated from the oppressive AIR(s) rituals and beliefs by the church and the gospel of Christ (Nasimiyu-Wasike, 1992:40–1). Needless to say, this is a very colonizing paradigm. The position is also a structural issue since many theological institutions and scholarships, like their historical missionaries and colonizers, have marginalized African Indigenous Religion(s)—by excluding them from the curriculum and by not offering any scholarships for study/research on the area. Consequently, it is mostly the well-formed and trained Christian scholars—those who converted to Christian beliefs and, who, given the colonial presentation of Christianity, have been taught to despise their own cultures who get to start writing about AIR(s). A significant amount of what that has been written about AIR(s) therefore needs to be decolonized.

Decolonizing Gender Frameworks

Lastly, like the AIR(s) themselves gender frameworks are somewhat as diverse as there are African ethnic groups. Here again we are in danger of employing gender categories of the west on AIR(s). One of the best attempts to study and define gender relations of African people is Ifi Amadiume’s work, in her first books, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* and *Re-inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture*. Amadiume, who is herself a Nigerian Igbo, grew up in Hausaland, a Muslim area, and studied western concepts of sociology and anthropology, recalls how she embarked on her fieldwork in Igboland—fully equipped with a Euro-centric framework for studying AIR(s) as follows.

I set out to do fieldwork knowing religion only as either god-centred or God-centred. I had no previous knowledge of religion as possibly being Goddess—and female-centered. Also,

my area of fieldwork had been classified as patrilineal by the few anthropologists who had some knowledge of the place. Most of my subsequent findings, which went contrary to received knowledge, were completely new to me (Amadiume, 1987:144).

Her research, which culminated in her book, *Male Daughters Female Husbands*, led her to conclude that the gender constructions amongst the Igbo “was dual and flexible,” rather than androcentric. That is, both genders are recognized and given social, economic, political and spiritual powers. In her latest book, *Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture*, Amadiume revisits and presses this point further, by assessing anthropological works that have been done on Africa. She argues that scholars came with western, Greek and Hebraic patriarchal frameworks of research and documentation, so much so that they virtually had no capacity to acknowledge matriarchy in the African gender system. She argues that in most western anthropological documentation of Africa there is a “missing matriarchy.” Based on her field work, Ife Amadiume insists on “matricentric production unit as basic material structure of African matriarchy and . . . that it was common to all traditional African social structures” (1987:29). She maintains that while most African societies had a matriarchal gender system, there was a sustained gender struggle for power between the sexes—with patriarchy trying to subordinate women to its rule through ritual, the economy, and law. Amongst the Igbo, Amadiume shows how this was finally sealed through colonialism and Christianity and Christian schools which insisted on conversion as part of admission and served a very masculine gendered education and Christian religion through church and the educational system (1987:28–38).

Amadiume’s thesis is strongly supported by Mercy A. Oduyoye’s description of how Nigerian Hausamen have re-appropriated the goddess for their own ends. She points out that

According to the Ibibio of Nigeria, there was a time when only women knew the secrets of the divinities (the avenging spirits) and those of the Great Mother (the supreme creator). In those days, there were more women than men, and men did all the hard work. By accident the men captured the shrine of the Great Mother, which was the women’s cult. The younger women voted to teach the men the secrets of the cult. When the men came into possession of this knowledge they beheaded the priestesses and took over the shrine. This it is said, is why the priests of the cult plait their hair and dress like women. Since all farming secrets were associated with the cult of the Great Mother, the men learned how to farm and forbade women to plant yam, the staple and ritual tuber (Oduyoye, 1995:32).

Oduyoye continues to explain that

the yam festival, held to honor the earth goddess, thus became a men’s festival, and the goddess became the deity of men’s secret societies. This is why today, when the statue of the goddess is in procession, women must hide. They are not to be seen or heard. The Mother Goddess, who used to be the source of power for women, has been appropriated by men and is now the reigning deity of men’s secret societies that demand that women remain voiceless and out of sight (1995).

While I have heard of the matriarchal societies of Malawi (Chewa), I could have easily accepted Ifi Amadiume matriarchal claim as a possibly west African characteristic than Southern African Bantu. But I was pleasantly surprised while researching for this paper to read an article about the Herero, a cattle-herding ethnic group found in Botswana, Namibia, and Angola, written by a Herero man, J.U. Kavari. In the article, "The social Organization, Religion and the Cosmos of the Ovaherero," Kavari, writes that

Ovaherero community is characterized by its dual descent, which structures its members into *oruzo* (patrilineage) and *eanda* (matrilineage). Ovaherero (both men and women) are born into their fathers' patrilineage and into their mother's matrilineages. . . . each Omuhherero is simultaneously attached to a matrilineage and to a patrilineage (Kavari, 2001:117).

Kavari continues to explain that "when one arrives at a place where one is not known, one is asked (a) question of identification . . . especially on ones' mother's side through the male (uncle). One is a proper Omuhherero when at least one's mother is proper Omuhherero" (2001:121). Kavari discusses the religious system that is integrated within the homestead, showing that it is led by the male head of the house, but "the senior wife of the priest or her daughter is the official administrator or caretaker of the great house and the *Okuruwo* (sacred shrine)" (2001:125). There are other ethnic groups such as the Wayeyi from the Okavango area who are also matriarchal. For the rest of the ethnic groups in Botswana, the traces of what could have been matriarchal gendered system amongst Batswana and other Bantu speaking ethnic groups are only attested by the significant role of the maternal uncle—the brother to any mother as the main decision maker in issues of marriage, relationships, and all major decisions.

I sent an e-mail to an East African friend, Nyambura Njoroge, asking about matriarchy amongst the Kikuyu and she replied:

The Gikuyu people were said to be matriarchal and this is how it all changed: Gikuyu, the man, had a wife named Mumbi, which means the creator or potter Mumbi is one of the names we use for God and is the feminine of course. Gikuyu and Mumbi had ten daughters, but we only count up to nine because you do not count to the last number. So the daughters got married, I do not know where the men came from. The daughters formed the clan names of the Gikuyu people. The women were rulers, but they eventually became ruthless and the men strategized to overthrow their government by making all of them pregnant the same time, and when they were delivering the men took over.

Given that Amadiume's proposal calls for a major paradigm shift for analyzing gender construction and relations in AIR(s), (one that cautions most of us from easily assuming that most African gender relations were patriarchal) she underlines that

we do need to develop a more comprehensive theory about African women's social organizations and their cultural models. A lot more work is needed on the history of marriage; the widespread social practice of woman to woman marriage, female-headed households, and matricentric socio-economic formations is Africa . . . (Amadiume, 1987:147).

Amadiume (2001) insists that we have yet to explain the predominance of matriarchy symbolism in myths and goddess-worship in the study of religions in Africa, and the juxtaposition of patriarchal and matriarchal tendencies in the social structures of African societies.

In sum, prevailing research on gender constructions amongst AIR(s) does not suggest a “androcentric” system or single sex gender system that completely marginalizes and excludes women from economic, political and spiritual powers. Rather, the two co-exist, with a lot of evidence about patriarchal attempts to usurp power from the matriarchal side. With a support of other scholars (e.g. Oduyoye, 1995), Amadiume suggests that concrete victory for patriarchy was inaugurated by the coming of colonialism and its androcentric Christian religion, and by education and its attempt to move the workplace from the home and to devalue the private space as well as women’s work. Nevertheless, Mercy Oduyoye, who comes from a matrilineal Akan group amongst the Ghananians argues that it makes very little difference whether one is from a matrilineal/matriarchal or patriarchal societies, because the fact of the matter is that women are suppressed in both systems. In fact Oduyoye argues that women from matriarchal societies carry a heavier burden than those from patriarchal societies (Oduyoye, 1995). In short, while both Oduyoye and Amadiume recognize the matriarchal side of most African religions, suppressed or vibrant, they do not equate it with an egalitarian or a feminist society.

With these methodological issues in mind, I wish to do a gender analysis of language and Diety/God; community and Ancestorhood; intermediaries; rites of passage; and women’s bodies in the community, using examples from Southern African Bantu ethnic groups. I will assess how these were constructed, how their gender relations were constituted and how they were impacted by modern colonial movements.

God/Diety Language: Feminist and Postcolonial Perspectives

Amongst the Bantu languages of Southern Africa, there is no gendered pronoun. *Motho*, *Nthu*, *Muntu*, is the root word for Bantu meaning “people.” The singular and plural are both gender neutral. The Bantu groups of Southern Africa can be subdivided into at least eight linguistic groups. These are the Nguni cluster, which consists of such groups as the Zulu, Swati, Xhosa, and Ndebele; the Sotho-Tswana cluster, which consists of Basotho, Batswana, Bapedi, and Barotse; the Sala-Shona, which consists of the Shona, Kalanga, Ndau, and Sena. There is also the Venda, Tsonga, Ihambane, Herero, and Central Bantu (Wayeyi, Simbukushu, and Chewa).

The names of God/Diety in all these groups are gender neutral. Amongst the Batswana God/Diety is *Modimo/Molimo*, that is, the one who dwells on high or the High One. In his book, *The Image of God Amongst the Sotho-Tswana*, Gabriel Setiloane, seeking to underline the gender-neutral aspects of the language, suggests that “we will better present Modimo with the pronoun It than He” (quoted in Ntloedibe-Kuswami, 2001:84). Amongst the Nguni groups the names of God/Diety include Nkulunkulu “the Highest One,” Qamata “The First One,” Umdali “Creator.” Amongst the Shona-Kalanga group

God/Diety is Mwari/Mwali “Creator”. These names are not only gender neutral, they also avoid describing God/Diety with gendered attributes.

Turning to West Africa some languages do not have gendered pronouns. The names of God/Diety, therefore, appear as primarily gender neutral. However, West Africa does name God/Diety anthropologically as Ataa Naa Nyonmo “Father Mother God,” Kpetek-plenye “mother of all big and wonderful things” (Abbey, 2001:141–42) or Kwasi Asi a daa Awisi “The Male-Female One” (Oduyoye, 1995:111). According to Oduyoye (1995:111), “these strong, but mixed images prevent an exclusively male God/Diety from reigning in the Akan subconscious.” If one draws from Ifi Amadiume’s thesis, one can see that West African names of God/Deity reflect dual gender system that recognizes both genders, rather than an androcentric gender system that more often than not constructs the divine realm and God from the same/male perspective.

While the naming of God/Diety is largely unproblematic, many African women have shown that biblical translations appropriated these same names with full patriarchal attributes of the biblical God (Ntloedibe, 2001; Mbuwayesango, 2001). For example, while Modimo amongst Batswana was gender neutral, in the Setswana Bible Modimo now fully wears the garments of a “Father, who art in Heaven.” Modimo is explicitly characterized as the Father of Jesus, his only Son (Ntloedibe, 2001:78–97). Similarly, the gender neutral Mwali/Mwari of the Shona people of Zimbabwe now wears a patriarchal identity (Mbuwayesango, 2001:63–77). The gender neutral languages of Southern Africa, therefore, were not allowed to counteract biblical patriarchy, rather the gender neutral Deity of Bantu was patriarchalised. This impact was largely established by the translation theories that privilege the source text (Bible) as unchangeable while the so-called target languages/cultures can be changed to serve the former. The translations’ impact maintain the patriarchal divine sphere of Christianity and both create and spread the same to the AIR(s), thus marginalizing women from the divine space, a construction that serves to legitimize their marginalization in social spaces (Dube, 2002:110–14). It remains to be seen how biblical translations would read if they were inculturated with gender-neutral languages and concepts of Deity from the AIR(s). But since most biblical translations in Africa date from colonial times (Yorke, 2004:154) and continue to use colonizing theories (Ntloedibe-Kuswani, 2001:78–82), decolonizing and depatriarchalizing biblical translations remain a huge task for African scholars of religion.

Ancestorhood and Feminism

Ancestors, or the Living Dead, describe the community of the dead who are held to be alive with the Diety/God, that is, Modimo/Qamata/Mwari. In Setswana and other Southern African languages Ancestors, are called Badimo/Badzimu/Medzimu/Amadlozi. As opposed to Modimo (who is always in the singular), they are always in the plural form, Ba-dimo, underlining their community identity. They are also genderless (Ntloedibe-Kuswani, 2001:86–8). The Badimo “those of Modimo” are a community of the Living Dead, who live with Modimo and continue to take active interest amongst the living. The Badimo are regarded as the intermediaries who carry

the prayers of the living community to Modimo and ensures the well-being of the living. Most prayers are directed to Badimo, who convey them to Modimo, Diety/God.

The Badimo, however, also play an essential role in maintaining ethical relationships and responsibility in society. Failure to care and to provide for one's relatives, especially the elderly; failure to observe taboos and traditions, failure to respect the earth through desecration can unleash the wrath of Badimo "Ancestors," who apparently withdraw their protection, thus leaving one exposed to evil forces, misfortune and ill health. Through this function the ancestors become the social text that maintains and re-enforces the ethical norms of the society. They become a social memory that reminds members of their expected and accepted responsibility to one another. The Badimo/Amadlozi/Badzimu "Ancestors," or the Living Dead, are honored and remembered through *phekolo*, community ceremonies of veneration.

There is evidence of the encroaching patriarchy into the realm of Ancestorhood/Badimo. First, Gabriel Setiloane (1976), who underlines the gender neutrality of Modimo, turns around and speaks of a very patriarchal line of ancestorhood and of approaching Badimo through a line of male gender. In his description, Badimo cease to be a gender neutral community, but a very patriarchally constituted community of the Living Dead. Setiloane's case represents a case of Christianized and colonized male cultural interpreters who continue the agenda of entrenching patriarchy in spaces that were not necessarily gender exclusive. Nokuzola Mndende, A Xhosa scholar of AIR(s) from South Africa, also observes a similar trend amongst the Xhosa—where there is a growing tendency to underline that Ancestorhood is only bestowed to those who receive a ritual of *ukubiyiswa* "bringing back"—a ritual that was performed for a male head of the family (Mndende, (1996:248). According to Mndende, women are now neglected and are not brought back. Similarly, Amadiume (1997) speaks of how the Goddess Idemile who was always an independent Goddess for women, appears as a wife of some Igbo groups, thus introducing a patriarchal domestication of female power.

Priesthood

Priesthood amongst the Bantu people was also gender inclusive. For example, amongst the Nguni and Shona people, Spirit mediums (*Sangoma* and *Wosana*) are primarily women. Even the men who are spirit mediums have to act as women during their operations/sessions. Spirit mediums are powerful social figures with healing and prophetic powers. In Botswana, where rain is a very scarce resource and droughts are frequent, Spirit mediums go to the shrine of Mwali on behalf of the people, carrying the dust of the land with their bodies. This enables seasonal rains to come in time for people to plough their crops. Perhaps, the dominance of women in priesthood attests to Mndende's claims—namely women in African Indigenous Religion(s) were held to be much closer to the Divine than men.

Amongst the Sotho-Tswana, priesthood was characterized more by the Diviner-herbalist (ngaka) who did not get Spirit possessed, but who nonetheless communicated with the Ancestors through a specialized divining set. The position of Diviner herbalist is supposedly gender-inclusive, although it has been noted that there are more males

in it than females due to the tendency of equating women diviner herbalists with witchcraft (Ntloedibe-Kuswani 1999). It is notable that this was the position that was also linked with community leadership, *bogosi*. The demonization of women Diviner-Herbalist serves to further distance them from political leadership.

In just about every other African group, Spirit Mediums are largely women (Mudende, 1996:248). Many theories have been expounded regarding women and Spirit possession. A popular theory holds that due to their powerlessness women become Spirit Mediums as a strategy of gaining social power that enables them to speak and to be heard in the society. African women scholars are critical of this interpretation, seeing it as another western category of analysis imposed on a non-western phenomena. Nukuzola Mndende (1996) thus provides a counter-argument, holding that we have to see these women for what they are: called by the Diety/God for a divine function in the society. She also argues from a sociological perspective; that because women have always been nurturers and healers—through centuries they have become more attuned to the sick (their children and husbands) and to the needs of people and hence developed skills in healing. By virtue of being caregivers, Mndende argues that women have also become tuned to the godly position of hearing the divine call to serve the community as Spirit Mediums. From West Africa, Amadiume (1997) is also critical of the perspective that links Spirit mediumship with the social powerlessness of women. Amongst the Igbo, Amadiume argues, it is actually the opposite. It is the powerful women: women who have excelled in their crop and market skills, who have won titles of achievement from the goddess Idimile, who actually get given the position of Spirit mediumship.

The Spirit power of priesthood from the AIR(s) has been used subversively by women in the church. That is, while most colonially founded churches excluded women from leadership either on the basis of race, gender or theological training, African women used the AIR(s) Spirit power to respond to God's call to begin new churches and lead them as prophet healers in the community. Today the African Independent Church (AICs) are the biggest in size and distribution. The AICs have their share of patriarchally founded and led movements—but no one can deny the dominance of women leadership in these churches. In fact, the very beginning of the AICs in 1776 is traced back to a woman, Kimba Vita, baptized as Dona Beatrice, who rebelled against both white images and male leadership by claiming that Jesus was black and had black disciples and that the Spirit of St. Patrick had possessed her. Although she was killed for her revolutionary theology, Kimba Vita found faithful followers in many other African women who have used the AIR(s) Spirit power to be founders and leaders of their own churches. Once when I interviewed one of these women leaders, pointing to the patriarchal texts of 1st Timothy 2:8–12, which says, “I do not allow women to speak in church or have power over men,” the woman (Bishop Virginia Lucas) replied me, “When God called me, God never opened the Bible to me” (Dube, 1997:126). Unlike the Bible translations that did not allow themselves to be transformed by gender-neutral African names of God, the gender-neutral priesthood embodied by women is definitely challenging patriarchal church and text by insisting on the another canon, the canon of the Spirit, one which calls both women and men. In these churches hybridity reigns.

Although Hybrid Christianity has enabled African women to claim power for themselves, patriarchal encroachment through biblical texts that transformed gender-

neutral concepts (e.g. *Modimo*) to strictly male ones has made culture also become more patriarchal. In the article "Healing, Women and Witchcraft" Ntloedibe-Kuswani 1999 found that there is a social/patriarchal instrument of distancing women from cultural priesthood, *dingaka*, by increasingly characterizing female *dingaka* as "witches." Women who assume these position have to contend with the social stigma of being labeled as witches. Similarly, illness tends to be attributed to female *Badimo* more than male ones. It is now a known and accepted strategy for women who realize that they have the indigenous cultural spiritual gifts of being *ngaka*, *sangoma*, or *wosana* to join a church and use the same as prophets in African Independent Churches than to assume the indigenous roles.

Community, Postcolonialism, and Feminism

In his articulation of the African understanding of being human and community, John Mbiti popularized the saying "I am because we are." The saying, with its individualistic clique "I am," emphasizes that one's humanity is only realized in the context where "we are," that is, in a communal setting. The second part of the saying focuses on community, that is, "we are." The latter, also, only becomes a community where the individual's humanity is fully recognized and respected—"we are because I am." In this world view both the individual and the community are equally important. The southern Africa Bantu saying, "*Motho ke motho ka batho/Umuntu ngu muntu nga Bantu*" more or less articulates the same understanding, by pointing out that "a person is only human through the community." In this saying there is much depth about what Bantu people believe about *motho/umuntu* "a human being" and the act of being a human (*botho/ubuntu*) and living according to the ethic of being human (*setho/isintu*) than I can fully elaborate in this article (see Mmualefe, 2004).

Given the centrality of community, this is where African Indigenous Religion(s) abide. Written scriptures and religion founders are not prominent since these are embodied by the community. What passes as ethical values that are expected by the Ancestors and the Divine being should be fully understood by all members as well as fully maintained within the society for peace, health, and prosperity to prevail. It is within this realm that rituals, songs, stories, myths, proverbs, sayings, riddles, and taboos are taught and executed, for the community itself is the body of the Divine. The rites of passage, from birth to death, the socialization of children and all individuals thus become extremely important for both the individual and the community to maintain their identity and for the sake of the society's survival and healthy co-existence with the Ancestors. Rites of passage enable the "I am" to be the "I am" who can live in the "we are" and the "we are" to be the "we are" that affirms all. It is in this process of socialization that gendered relations are constructed, where, politics, economics and cultural life is lived out in full acknowledgement of *Badimo* "Ancestors" as looking over with interest that all is well maintained.

Consequently, many AIR(s)' exponents rightfully capitalize on expounding the various rites of passage (Cox, 1988; Oduyoye, 1992:9–24; Edet, 1992:25–39) and the function and meaning of proverbs, myths, rituals, and legends (Oduyoye, 1995). It is the social formation of a person in and through community that the place of a

woman in AIR(s), can be observed. No doubt these will widely differ according to different ethnic groups, time and place. I must thus strongly recommend Mercy Oduyoye's book, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*, for it has made a thorough effort to analyze myths, stories, proverbs, taboos, ritual, culture, and relationships to highlight how gender is constructed, maintained, and transformed in AIR(s) and how it impacts women's life. Oduyoye uses the Akan examples occasionally contrasting them with the Nigerian Yoruba traditions, her marriage home. Clearly, as Ifi Amadiume points out, a lot more fieldwork research and analysis needs to be done in different regions of Africa, focusing on different or representative groups, to investigate how gender was constructed, maintained, and how it has been transformed during the colonial and post-independence.

The colonial impact and the urbanization that occurred afterwards had caused massive movements of people, calling for a new understanding and execution of being and living in community. As I have argued elsewhere:

However, AIR/s must be continually re-interpreted for different contexts and times. Given the multitude of social challenges that confront the African continent, the task of bringing AIR/s to speak to the liberation and empowerment of people is vital. Indeed, a great challenge that confronts AIR/s scholars is to analyze why the community-oriented cosmology of Africa has produced some of the most insidious national corruptions, deadly ethnic wars, rampant poverty and diseases. The AIR/s scholar in community should articulate for us, "What is community in our contemporary times and within the new and "imagined communities called nations." How should the concept of community be re-imagined, re-created and re-constructed to empower its members against poverty, civil violence, child abuse, gender inequality, national corruption, ethnic and sexual discrimination such that the values of "I am because we are and we are because I am," can be empowering policies (Dube 2006).

I continue to I argue that

the concept of community . . . ought to and should become the cornerstone of propounding African indigenous theology of justice and liberation by constantly revisiting "what is means to be community and to live in community," "what violates community", and "how we can live in community in our new and hybrid 21st century contexts." Being a community is not and cannot be a one time thing—rather, it is a process that must be continually cultivated by its members. This approach should inform the continual assessment and review of all oppressive relationships and the re-imagination of communities that respect and empower all its members regardless of class, gender, age, ethnicity, race, sexuality, nationality for it is only then that, we can say, "I am because we are and we are because I am" (2006).

The Future of Feminist African Religion

In conclusion, from Ancestorhood, priesthood and within a community, a woman's role in AIR(s) carries a great deal of ambiguity and has undergone significant change in

modern colonial, post-independence era and global era. Culturally African communities were not androcentric or single sex based, but neither were they egalitarian communities. To use Amadiume's phrase, most African societies had "dual and flexible" gender constructions that empowered both sexes. Although African texts indicate a gradual encroachment of patriarchy, studies indicate that the coming of Christianity and colonialism shifted gender roles towards a patriarchal system. AIR(s) have thus undergone a great deal of change as their communities changed during colonial times and in post-independent era. One major issue is that women have become more marginalized in the divine, economic, political, and cultural spaces of power. Documentation of women's role in AIR(s) has begun to be carried out, not only by African males and western scholars, but also by African women. More fieldwork is needed on how some AIR(s)' perspectives can be re-employed for the empowerment of African women in their societies, communities, departments, churches and biblical translations. This will need decolonized scholars, departments of religion, scholarship, and entering the public space for the well-being of women, African people, and the earth community as a whole.

Notes

- 1 Indeed texts and scriptures exist in other forms such as symbols, clothes prints, songs, rituals etc.
- 2 Diety/God or sometime The Divine will be used to underline that theological concept of AIR/s Diety should not be collapsed to the biblical one.
- 3 A colonial and colonizing paradigm has taught us to write down many religions and their concepts and in small capitals, while Christian concepts of the divine are written in capitals. As part of decolonizing, in this article I use capitals for Ancestors/the Living Dead communities.
- 4 In this chapter, I use African Indigenous Religion(s) (AIR(s)) to indicate that some prefer to use it in the singular while others make it plural.

CHAPTER 8

Religion and the Environment

Edward P. Antonio

When asked to write on religion and the environment in Africa sometimes one is at a loss as to what is being asked for. First, what or whose religion—Christianity, African Traditional Religions, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism? There are in fact significant differences in worldview, culture, in belief, teachings, and practices among these religions. We, therefore, cannot pretend, even where comparable structures in “ideology” and outlook exist, that the teachings of one of these religions on the environment are necessarily representative of all the others. Here I shall focus on “African traditional beliefs” and practices. The phrase “African traditional beliefs,” does not name some hidden autochthonous or self-originating and self-appropriating reality. There is no such reality. African cultures, whatever similarities and family resemblances may be detected, are marked by immense differences. Indeed, to understand the similarities we must first understand the differences. Although I do not attend to these differences here my account takes their existence for granted and is thus both partial and open to revision because it largely leaves out of consideration the contributions of other religions to the quest for solutions to African environmental problems; it is partial in another turn because it recognizes difference and distance within and among African cultures themselves.

Second, there is the persistent question of Africa: which Africa? This is not trivial. We need, right at the start, to dispose of the rather incoherent supposition that Africa constitutes one environment, natural or otherwise. To hang on to this unitary conception flies in the face of the immense differences that radically divide up the continent by rivers and plants, mountains and oceans, land and weather patterns, forests and deserts, cultures and traditions. Appearances notwithstanding, what follows in not universally applicable.

In this essay I proceed as follows: I shall first say something about the immediacy or urgency of the environmental problem in Africa. Here I address the question of the significance of this urgency for the possibility of an African religious philosophy of

the environment. I characterize this urgency in terms of the problem of climate change or global warming. Second, I describe some African traditional attitudes towards trees and sacred groves in order to ground and propose an African contribution to the mitigation of the effects of climate change. I discuss several examples of sacred groves and other related sites and practices pertaining to them. Third, by way of clarification, I briefly discuss the idea of the “sacred” itself in order to recover and expand its ethical implications for ecological practices in Africa and beyond. This is followed by a brief conclusion that situates African ecological thinking in the context of the kinds of economies of adaptation proposed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Kairos

The possibility of a future syncretistic or pluralistic religious philosophy of the environment in Africa entails, among other things, imagining what such a philosophy will look like beginning for the need and not the existence of such a philosophy. Such a religious philosophy must begin with both the most *immediate* problems and the long and convoluted histories of environmental denudation on that continent.¹ This starting point is necessary because the environmental crisis is immediate and threatens life not just on some nebulous thing called “the planet” but more concretely in particular and local communities in Africa. The requirement of immediacy reflects the urgency of the moment in which we find ourselves. It is a kairotic moment marked by an extreme crisis. Where might such a philosophy look for resources? It will look not just to one tradition or religion but to all sources that seek to promote a sustainable human and natural ecology. In Africa this will mean looking to all the religions present on the continent for tremendous possibilities for a rich pluralistic philosophy of the environment. It will also mean looking to the sciences (natural and social) to ground such a philosophy in the latest ideas about our current crisis and the possibilities for resolving it. This multifaceted approach is necessary simply because no one method, belief, ideology, or set of practices or policies is by itself adequate to the size and complexity of the environmental challenges that face Africa. This philosophy is rooted in an open and collaborative spirit in which the ecological insights and practices of the *other* are seen and accepted as important contributions for saving the earth and its inhabitants. The lesson of pluralism which this entails says something crucial about human ecology. This democratic thrust of a future African religious philosophy of the environment will have a double advantage: first, it will contribute significant insights to the search for effective solutions to the challenges of the ecological crisis, and second it will trace out the contours of the possibility of a political ecology of social and cultural tolerance. Instances of recognition of “kairos,” of “immediacy”, and “urgency” can be found in African traditional religions. When the rains have not come and the prolonged rigours of drought have taken their toll certain African cultures will call upon their ancestral spirits to intervene on behalf of the land, of the animals and the people. This is a ritual moment of rare occurrence invoked only in times of extreme emergence. It involves rituals of social purification, healing of ruptured relationships, and the reparation of desecrated nature. I am not primarily interested in the metaphysics that lie behind these

practices but rather in their social function where their effects are felt and how they concretely shape how people live vis-à-vis their environment.

What are some of the immediate problems that must be confronted by a future religious philosophy of the environment in Africa? I shall start with greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, CFCs, and fluorinated gases predominantly generated by the industrialized countries. These gases are the cause of the problem of climate change—rising seas, droughts, severe storms, and other forms of extreme weather. I start here not because religions in Africa or elsewhere for that matter have anything directly or indirectly to tell us about the content of these gases or how they contribute to climate change but rather because, in the first instance, climate change has become a focal point for the articulation of many other environmental problems. Its effects on the wellbeing of forests, food production and security, desertification, compromised coastal infrastructures, rainfall patterns, negative impacts on fresh water supplies, population growth, health, and the quality of land and landscapes are far-reaching. Second, I start with climate change because Africa itself will be severely impacted by global warming, and is indeed experiencing serious problems in this regard.² The United Nations has made it clear that “Africa will be hard hit by climate change. Projected climatic changes for Africa suggest a future of increasingly scarce water, falling agricultural yields, encroaching desert and damaged coastal infrastructure. The continent, with the largest share of least developed countries, is less endowed than other regions with the adaptive capacities—technology, institutions, and financial resources—to buffer and cope with climate impacts.”³ This, of course, means that a religious contribution to the resolution of environmental problems in Africa must take with utmost seriousness the devastating impacts of this problem. It means, as I shall argue, that possible solutions must be sought for in unusual places: in the history of indigenous ecological practices, in attitudes towards scared groves and other sites and practices.⁴ Third, it is important to approach the environmental question in Africa through global warming because, as the United Nations Population Fund report, *The State of the World Population 2009*, has suggested human practices and behaviour are central to both how the problem has come about and how it may be alleviated if not solved. The behaviour and practices in question range from “what we consume, the types of energy we produce and use” to “whether we live in a city or on farm, whether we live in a rich or poor country, whether we are young or old, what we eat, and even the extent to which we enjoy equal rights and opportunities.”⁵

The report goes on to describe climate change in terms of the importance of people. “Climate change is about people. People cause climate change. People are affected by it. People need to adapt to it. And only people have the power to stop it.” The link between people, practices and “nature” is of course crucial to any definition of the environment, and I shall return to these links below. For now, I want to make several points. The first is that the report emphasizes the place and role of humans in climate change in order to draw attention to the extent to which climate change has become a question of justice and survival for the poorest people of the world, especially women and children who it says carry a disproportionate burden of its impact. The question of justice has several dimensions. To begin with it refers to the historical problem of the disproportionate emissions of greenhouse gases by industrialized countries without

regard to their consequences for the environment and impacts on other countries and in the name of an unsustainable paradigm of progress and development. Second, the injustice has to do with the fact that it is not the industrialized countries but the poor countries of the South that now carry the incommensurate burdens of living with global warming. A third aspect of the question of justice relates to the fact that it is women and children in these poor countries who are suffering the most because of climate change. The question of justice as I pose it here is simultaneously religious and ethical.

The United Nations report is clear that only humans can stop climate change. The question is how? We have known for longtime time now that the solution to our environmental plight resides in changing our practices, our lifestyles, our policies, and outlooks. The UN report says as much. It is here that I wish to bring in religion in Africa. Again, this is not because the practice of religion in Africa or the articulation of African religious doctrine has been productive of unique insights into greenhouse gases, it is rather because religion in Africa has something to say about people and their practices, and about *how* people must conduct themselves. On the whole, the cultures of Africa tend to frame reality in terms of a range of anthropocentric paradigms.⁶ Indeed religions themselves are situated and practiced both in the context of these paradigms as well in some or other natural environment. Making humans and human practices central to our search for solutions to global warming means being prepared to attend to every resource available to humans today. The anthropocentric paradigms around which African conceptions of reality revolve are of strategic importance for understanding the approaches to the environment.

The environment is partly a human-made phenomenon but it also makes humans. Humans make the environment in the light of their needs, wants, and desires. It is important in speaking of the environment in Africa to take seriously the connections that exists between peoples, their livelihoods, and the natural surroundings which provide the context for those livelihoods. It is not the case that humans exist on one plane and the environment on another other, that there is, as it were, a natural disjunction between the two in which humans survive by manipulating, exploiting, making use of, and mastering the environment and the latter either succumbs to or resists human encroachment. Of course, humans are simultaneously nature and more than nature, of course there is a some tension built into this distinction, a tension that is built into the relations between humans and various parts of "nature" but it is a mistake to think of this tension in some ontological way, to imagine it as given and fixed and thus not made in and through the very relations within which "nature" and humans encounter each other. It is better to think of these relations as the mutual limitations and openings that facilitate and sustain life understood here as the networked totality of the eco-systems we call the environment. What I am arguing for here is not uniformity but continuity in which animals, rivers, plants, different weather patterns (the climate) in their geographic zones, humans, land, mountains, oceans, etc., form a continuous creative energy that keeps the earth vital. What I have in mind can best be described as a continuity of limitation whereby nature just because it is nature imposes limits (constraints) on human activity, and human activity just because it is human activity responds to nature controlling and regulating at least aspects of its

behavior. Out of this is born a structure of rules, regulations, precepts, bodies of knowledge, and modes of being that themselves become part of the environment but whose function is to provide some understanding of the structure of the relations among various segments or aspects of that environment by constructing variable patterns of relationships among humans and nature as well as among humans themselves, relationships whose continued existence demands sustainable practices.

Trees, Sacred Groves, and Related Practices

African traditional attitudes towards the environment cannot be adequately understood outside of an important cluster of concepts which define the social meanings of “homeostatic” phenomena such as trees, the bush, “the forest,” “sacred groves,” and the wilderness. Together these ideas offer a good framework for discussing African religious ecologies. I shall focus on trees and sacred groves as sites of ecological importance. The basic claim that I want to illustrate is that some African ecological practices revolve around respecting some parts of nature and that this respect is derived from the belief that some parts of nature are sacred. To illustrate this I offer a discussion of several examples. First, I shall discuss African apprehensions of reality constructed around notions of and attitudes towards “trees” and “the bush.”

An interesting example of this can be found among the Dogon. Walter E.A. van Beek and Pieteké M. Banga have discussed the extent to which Dogon respect trees and the bush. Although various observable parts of the bush such as animals, rocks, and trees are dreaded for various reasons: both the bush and trees are valued as sources of survival. They provide food, timber, firewood, medicines, and they maintain the soil against wind and water erosion. In addition to this pragmatic attitude Dogon also see the bush and the trees within it as inhabited by various spirits. What is interesting is that these two ways of thinking about the bush are situated within a distinction between *oru*, the bush, and *ana* the village. Furthermore, *oru* is the source of all power, knowledge, wisdom, and life, even death.⁷ Rituals around procreation as well as funereal rituals derive from bush spirits and animals. Because trees are medicinal the bush is also a source of healing. Indeed trees are invested with wisdom and power. They can walk and talk. Rocks too can walk and talk.⁸ Dogon attitudes to the bush are characterized by respect and the need to follow proper ritual protocol. For example, using a tree for medicinal purposes requires ritually talking to the tree or, when using a tree for construction or for making utensils a proper axe must be used. Village or “farmhouse” trees can never be cut without their owner’s permission. In fact, some trees can never be cut, only their branches. Some trees belong to lineages and sublineages of their first cultivators. This means that respect for the trees entails respect for the way in which the village is organized.⁹ The distinction between village and bush is an important part of this organization.

Although Dogon beliefs on the importance of trees and of the bush described above provide a striking example of a rather pervasive understanding of the nature, status, and function of concepts such as the bush it is important to recognize that these beliefs vary according to place and culture across Africa. Thus, whatever generalization might

be made about them and the practices with which they are associated must, in the light of local differences, remain open to continuous qualification. Nonetheless, the symbolic significance of such trees and of the bush has been observed elsewhere in Africa, especially in the context of the status and function assigned to sacred groves.

As I have already hinted, sacrality or the quality of being sacred and the way in which this is imputed to trees and other natural phenomena is more or less characteristic of many African cultures. I want to use it here to move to my third example of African ecologies of the bush and of trees—Sacred Groves. What is interesting about sacred groves are not only the histories with which they are associated—they are often thought of as the past of primeval forests—but also their prevalence and importance across Africa.

Sacred groves are found all over Africa. Although they are comprised of fragments and patches of vegetation, they are rich in animal, insect, and plant (this includes rare plants) diversity. They frequently serve as places of refuge for endangered animals. Thus, far from being historical relics or places of desolation they are condominiums of ecological vitality.¹⁰ The importance of sacred groves in African culture coincides with their functions or the uses to which they are put by humans precisely as sources of that vitality or of the “humanization” of aspects of it. These uses are many and range from, on the one hand, their symbolic significance as places where ancestral spirits reside to being, on the other hand, sites of *in situ* conservation as well as being sources of food and medicine. A good example of the relationship between traditional medicine and sacred groves can be found in the work of Aiah R. Lebbie and Raymond Guries on the Kppa Mende of Sierra Leon. These two scholars interviewed herbalists working in no less than twenty-three sacred groves.¹¹ The sacred groves they discuss have both spiritual and material dimensions. These indicate the range of uses to which the groves are put. Lebbie and Guries mention the following: initiation ceremonies, spiritual rites, female circumcision, adolescent education, places of training for herbalists, sources of medicinal plants, as well as what they call a “traditional hospital” for specialized treatment of the sick.

Similarly, in their extensive work on eight sacred groves of the Uganda (*sic*) chieftaincy of the Wanyamwezi in central Tanzania, F.H. Mugumia and G. Oba have shown how the ecological importance of groves coincides with their cultural significance. They describe these groves as “specialized systems of conservation associated with the religious beliefs of the Wanyamwezi.” The power of these beliefs, that is, the power that allows them to institute the sacred as the basis of the cultural meanings attached to the groves is presupposed or contained in the status of these sites as “burial grounds”, “sites of ancestral worship”, or what Mugumia and Oba describe as their “complex social-spiritual associations with deities and spirits of dead ancestors.” They represent “cultural landscapes” that are “central to the spiritual needs of the local people, with specific trees and blocks of woodlands conserved for cultural and ritual reasons.”¹² Again as in the other cases we have discussed so far, these groves are regulated and protected by taboos. The reversible application of the idea of landscape here is obvious. Cultural landscapes stand in for natural landscapes and vice versa. There is a structural mutuality in the function of language and social and natural phenomena. To be sure, the power of these landscapes in the double sense I have just suggested (as bush and

forest and as village and culture) derives from multiple sources. It derives first from the stories people tell regarding their relationships to these spaces. In her *Imagining Serengeti*, Jan Bender Shetler makes several interesting points. She comments that some of the core images prevalent in African traditions are images of place, landscape, and topography;¹³ she also informs us that the people of the Serengeti locate their origins and genealogical identities in the framework these images.¹⁴ A final point that Shetler makes is that the Serengeti is a humanized, worked over, and socially appropriated space. Second, the power of the bush also comes from its functions. For example, it provides food, medicines, and fuel.¹⁵

A second example comes from the preservation of indigenous trees in the peasant farming areas of southern Zimbabwe. K.B. Wilson discusses the types of trees that were preserved and the reasons for their preservation. According to Wilson these trees stand as symbols of indigenous resistance to state agricultural policies that encouraged their felling. The trees were preserved for several reasons: "Furthermore these trees were associated with land spirit guardianship, an important feature of social and political life in Central Africa";¹⁶ Research into woodland dynamics also pointed to the great importance of the leaving of trees in fields if tree requirements were to be met and valuable trees be present in abandoned arable land. This was especially true for fruits, but also for timber, firewood, fibre, shade, and a whole host of other products. Finally, the trees were clearly contributing to agriculture through improving the nutrient status of poor "worked out" sandy soils, with some beneficial effects on crop-yields. Wilson seems to think that tree preservation in southern Zimbabwe goes back to at least the 1600s. It is not that the people of southern Zimbabwe were generally averse to cutting down trees or that they indiscriminately venerated every tree. As Wilson has shown, certain trees, including some large trees, could be felled, burnt from the base, or the branches chopped off. Tree stumps were for the most part left alone. However, other trees were not available for cutting. Among the latter category were trees designated as special such as fruit trees. Cutting these was expressly forbidden by ancestral spirits for the benefit of all.¹⁷ Wilson gives an interesting reason and one that relates directly to conservation, as to why tree stumps were generally left alone. He writes:

Leaving the stumps and even trunks of unwanted tree species in part reflected the fact that it was not sensible to invest tremendous labour in destumping the land when that land was likely to be abandoned in the not too distant future. It also was part of a concern that the area should be able to rapidly revert to woodland on abandonment. Miombo woodland species generally coppice extremely powerfully, and under this level of disturbance the woodland reverts to one of similar composition as before, with the valuable trees that were left having a head start¹⁸

At the heart of the prohibition to cut down precious trees was a religious view of the world in which the requirements and expectations of ancestral spirits were decisive. Spirit mediums and other village authorities served to "police" and monitor the use of natural resources and thus to administer punishment for any infractions. In this view certain trees may not be cut because they are sacred, and they are sacred because they are inhabited by the spirits. As such they do not belong to any one person but to the

whole community, or the manner in which community ownership of precious trees and other natural resources is effected is through the mediation of spirits. The sacredness of trees thus tells us something about ownership of natural resources.¹⁹ It is important to notice here that the value of these trees is established at two related levels: their sacrality and their social utility or the way in which they are used. The relationship between the two derives from the fact that the structure and conditions of social use depend on the constraints of sacrality. Use itself is informed and guided by sacrality.

The Refusal of the Sacred²⁰

I have focused on sacred groves and the idea that many African trees, mountains, and various parts of nature are sacred. Although botanists and others may find the physical phenomena that comprise these parts of nature to be of primary interest and even discern some ecological value in them on the basis of their particular properties, what really interests me here is something else: the phenomenon of sacralization or the belief that nature or parts of nature is sacred. My appeal to sacred groves, trees, etc., for grounding ways of thinking and social practices that have the potential to be environmentally friendly is, on the face of it, threatened by the very notion of the sacred. This is a notion that is associated with gods, religion, and spirits. In a post-Enlightenment world, and so a world commonly alleged to be secular, in which environmental policies are defined, set, and implemented by scientists, post-religious humanists, and religiously indifferent experts, the notion of the sacred will be dismissed as a superstitious relic or a moralistic representation of an animistic avatar. Luckily, allegations of secularism as a zero sum game have remained just that—allegations. The sacred has refused and continues to refuse to go away. Indeed, it is not just suspected “animists” who continue to invoke it but also hard-headed philosophers²¹ (including agnostics) and scientists.²²

The notion of the sacred has been making a rather remarkable comeback of late and this not just in discussions of religion, but also in aesthetics, law, and crucially for my argument, in environmental as well as in bioethics. The “return” of the sacred, as it has been dubbed by some, is meant to serve metaphorically or categorically (or both) to ground and adjudicate the claims of ethics or morality in relation to the environment and bioethics. In a sense this is how it functions in the notion of sacred groves in Africa. But before I say more about this, it is useful to briefly describe what is meant by the sacred in the new discussions that characterize the re-emergence or retrieval of this concept. Obviously I cannot go into great detail here. Traditionally, the sacred has been constructed around notions of gods and transcendence in which something is sacred just in the sense in which a god, spirit, or some aspect of transcendence is deemed co-present in the thing so named. This is the ontological idea of the sacred. Another version of the sacred removes the idea of the presence of gods and spirits (though not ontology as such) from the definition but retains that of transcendence while at the same time introducing the concept of value. According to this conception “[S]omething that is sacred has value that transcends human affairs in the straightforward sense that it is experienced as having value independent of human decisions and preferences.”

According to Gregory E. Kaebnick this means that the sacred “is a value that inheres in the nature of things.”²³

Another way of speaking of this is in terms of the intrinsic value of things. The status of the sacredness of a thing *qua* sacred is guaranteed by the thing’s intrinsic value as its most constitutive element. This is the idea on which Ronald Dworkin has recently based his effort to rethink the application of the notion of the sacred in bioethics and law. While this idea is quite complex and cannot be gone into here in any more detail, there are two other important points derived from it which provide the basis of its ethical application that I want to comment upon. The first is that it is linked to inviolability. The sacred is that which demands and bears witness to the protection of something from profane destruction. As we shall see, it is the figure of prohibition against destructive interference. The second idea is that the sacred resists the reduction of its “being,” of what it is, to instrumental value. This, I think, is what is meant when it is asserted that the sacred exists independently of human interests or possible use. As I said earlier, all of this requires considerable unpacking and further discussion which I have not the space to accommodate here but the two points I have just mentioned provide a way of pointing to one of the major differences between “African” uses of the sacred and those that are emerging in the context of western environmental and bioethics.

In Africa the sacred functions much more through the figure of prohibition than it does through that of its putative autonomy from human concerns. Although writing in a different context and about a different culture it was precisely this aspect of the function of the sacred that Durkheim recognized in the circumstances on which he was writing as necessarily the place where society and human interaction are constituted. The sacred in Durkheim’s account is hedged about by interdictions and prohibitions. Interdictions are essentially negative; they prohibit, circumscribe, and require obedience. They are in this sense ethical. The ethical character of these interdictions derives both from their negative function (they prohibit) as well as from their positive requirements that is the requirements they impose upon members of a community. In other words, prohibition is not a minimalist trope that is silenced by the mere fact of its negative declarations. The declarations are informative in that by forbidding certain forms of behavior they also encourage others. Not to do that which is forbidden is, in fact, to accomplish the ends for which the interdiction is declared. The explanations given by priests, village elders, and diviners, for the role or function of the interdiction, the justification of the interdiction (its discursive authority) is a replete with cues, hints, requirements, expectations, intentions, judgments, values, and structures of orientation that give the interdiction the character it has and establishes the terms of its relationship to a society, and the latter’s mode of response to it. In a certain sense, on Durkheim’s account, these prohibitions and interdictions are the parameters of the identity of the sacred. This is their substantive as distinct from discursive authority.

It is clear, prescinding from Durkheim’s presuppositions, but also as I have tried to show, from African understandings of sacrality, that the sacred itself constitutes a positive ethics of the ban, of censorship, restriction, and regulation which mediates the relationship among humans, nature, and spirits. By positive I mean that what these

restrictions intend is the overall health of humans and nature. My claim is that what characterizes the respect and protection that is accorded to sacred groves, trees, mountains, rivers, and animals, in many African cultures, is this notion of the sacred. The question, in the context of this essay, is whether or not this is of any relevance to environmental ethics.

I began with the urgency of the problem of climate change and its impact on Africa, and now I want to return to that problem in order to briefly address this question. Sacred groves sustain threefold ecology: a spiritual ecology; a natural ecology; and social or human ecology. First, I have already dealt with the spiritual aspect of this in commenting on the role of ancestral spirits in the protection of sacred groves. My point was to note the strong connection that exists between religion and ecology in the structure of sacred groves. Second, I think that the most direct connection between sacred groves and other revered sites like them and natural ecology is their function as carbon sinks. These sinks are reservoirs, catchment areas such as natural or human-made structures—such as oceans, soils, and forests—that capture, absorb, and sequester carbon chemical compounds. Encouraging indigenous attitudes that ensure the sustainable management of trees and soils is important because trees and soils can capture and sequester carbon gases from the atmosphere. Whatever one ultimately makes of the idea of the sacred, it is obvious that insofar as it results in practices that encourage afforestation, reforestation, and the preservation of forests and other forms of natural variety it makes an important contribution to human efforts to arrest climate change and its impacts. Third, to the extent that the beneficial environmental practices around sacred groves and other venerated parts of nature are inspired by the desire to secure moral and physical inter-subjective welfare they help construct a sustainable human ecology. This threefold structure of the ecology of sacred groves and trees has, in turn, a number of adjunctive effects which more or less directly correspond to the destructive collateral ramifications of climate change. These effects include, for example, making available herbs for medicines, plants for food, trees for firewood and fuel, the re-balancing of gender relations as well as the preservation of biodiversity. All of this, needless to say, sustains human communities. To illustrate this point I want to highlight the motif of medicine which gives us some evidence of one of the social functions of trees. We have seen that the medicinal aspects of the trees and plants found in sacred groves are of social and ecological significance because they are obviously connected with the wellbeing of both society and nature. Lebbie and Guries argue: “In most rural communities throughout Africa, traditional folk medicine remains a primary source of health care as most modern medical services are inaccessible.” There are two points to make here. First, as I pointed out earlier in this essay, the UN report on Population is clear that climate change will have huge health impacts on the poor especially those in Africa. If the groves are destroyed two things will happen: their use for medicinal purposes will be destroyed; the rich biodiversity of these groves together with their potential to serve as carbon sinks will also be destroyed, since medicine is about cure and healing. At the level of language at least the healing and cure with which these groves are associated is important. One of the key metaphors in environmental and ecological discussions has become the metaphor of healing and repairing the earth.

Conclusion

I have argued several things in this paper. First, that African attitudes of respect and protection of some parts of nature make a modest contribution to the search for ways of mitigating aspects of the ecological crisis which now threatens the planet. This invokes practices which, on the face of it, may seem to have nothing to do with environmental problems but they yield and articulate a substantive body of insights which are epistemologically significant for understanding indigenous patterns of addressing environmental challenges. Second, I have strongly insinuated that in their own way these practices and insights *actually* address aspects of the environmental challenges confronting Africa today both in terms of immediate impacts as well as in terms of some of the collateral environmental crises, i.e. crises that are provoked by those challenges. To the extent that this is the case, we can argue that the ecological economy of sacred groves and respect for nature instantiate relevant adaptive strategies for the preservation of biodiversity. Adaptation, in the jargon of climate change experts, is about adjusting natural and human systems to anticipated or prevailing changes in the climate and their effects. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change distinguishes among various types of adaptation such “anticipatory and reactive adaptation, private and public adaptation, and autonomous and planned adaptation”.²⁴ In the context of African beliefs and practices this is how people have traditionally coped with the impacts of environmental crises. Since these crises threaten local livelihoods and daily means of survival, relevant ecological policies must address local practices that have the potential of mitigating climate change or fashioning sustainable adaptive behaviours.²⁵ These are practices that conduce to reforestation; practices that will make current and future fresh water supplies possible; practices that will slow or eliminate declining agricultural yields and increase the ratio of those same yields relative to population and need.

The significance of these practices is determined by their potential to contribute to the search for sustainable ecologies and the opportunities they open up for community participation in environmental protection. The logic of this connection between community participation and sustainability is consistent with African understandings of the “dialectical” relationship between nature and humans and the United Nations recognition that humans are central to both the creation and the resolution of our environmental crises and privations. The UN blames climate change on “anthropogenic emissions,” and believes that the solution to the problem must be anthropogenic. However, if the idea of community participation is to extend beyond episodic and *ad hoc* environmental activities it must be framed in terms of the larger context of the social modes via which the conjuncture of the sacred and the practices it demands are appropriated and lived out. This entails incorporating the many and varied places at which the sacred crops up in African culture beyond sacred groves and other sites as also sites for the production of holistic or homeostatically structured social and ecological relationships. These arguments have been advanced in industrialized countries urging citizens to reduce and contain their carbon footprint (the total amount of CO₂ or carbon dioxide emissions for which an individual is responsible in any one year). The

difference between these arguments and my argument is the way in which I have pointed to sacrality in at some African cultures.

Notes

- 1 I focus on the role of beliefs and practices with the potential of *mitigating* aspects of *environmental* damage that have accrued in the pre-colonial or indigenous; colonial policies and practices; neo-colonial, and postcolonial era. The three dominant religions in Africa, African Traditional Religions, Islam, and Christianity all bear the traces of these histories. Here I shall focus on aspects of African Traditional Religions and on Christianity. See Jacob A. Tropp, *Natures of Colonial Change: Environmental Relations in the Making of the Transkei*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006; Nancy J. Jacobs. *Environment, Power and Injustice: A South African History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- 2 Thalif Deen, "Climate change: Africa Readies United Front for Crucial Copenhagen Talks" <http://www.ipsnews.net/africa/nota.asp?idnews=48959>.
- 3 United Nations General Assembly, "Climate Change and its possible Security implications", Report of the Secretary-General, 11 September, 2009, p. 18.
- 4 On the interest of African religious leaders in climate change see "WTD in Africa: Religious forum urges action on climate change" at <http://groups.google.com/group/tourismscan/web/wtd-in-africa-religious-forum-urges-action-against-climate-change>
- 5 The United Nations Population Fund report, *The State of the World Population 2009*, p.1.
- 6 I am aware that there is resistance in some quarters to anthropocentrism which some view as the cause, if not the sole cause of "the environmental crisis" but this resistance is often premised on western notions of the self neglecting other views of being human. I do not discuss African views of the self or the overworked notion of "ubuntu" and its importance to community.
- 7 Walter E.A. van Beek and Pietek M. Banga, "The Dogon and their Trees" in *Bush Base and Forest Farm: Culture, Environment and Development*. Edited by Elisabeth Croll and David Parkin. London and New York: Routledge, 1992:67–8.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid. pp.69–70.
- 10 I use the term "condominium" here to highlight the fact that sacred groves are jointly "owned" by the animals, plants, and spirits that inhabit them as well as by the humans who use them.
- 11 Aiah R. Lebbie and Raymond Guries, "Ethnobotanical value and conservation of sacred groves of the Kpaa Mende in Sierra Leone." *Economic Botany* 49(3):297–308.
- 12 F.H. Mgumia and G. Oba. "Potential role of sacred groves in biodiversity conservation in Tanzania." *Environmental Conservation* 30(3):259–265.
- 13 Jan Bender Shetler, *Imagining Serengeti: A History of Landscape Memory in Tanzania from Earliest times to the Present*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007; p.19.
- 14 Ibid. One interesting aspect on Shetler's book is the balance she seeks to strike between the discourse of "wilderness" (this keeps cropping up in her discussion) and understanding the Serengeti as a deeply humanized landscape.
- 15 See the claim by Jacob Tropp, *Natures of Colonial Change: Environmental Relations in the Making of the Transkei*, p.132.

- 16 K.B. Wilson, "Trees in Fields in Southern Zimbabwe," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Special Issue on The Politics of Conservation in Southern Africa (Jan., 1989), pp. 369–83; p.370.
- 17 Ibid., p.375.
- 18 Ibid., p.372.
- 19 Ibid., pp.375–8.
- 20 "Refusal" refers both to the refusal of the sacred to go away, to its persistent "return" as well as to the logic by which it bans, forbids and thus withholds approval to acts of desecration of the environment.
- 21 Ronald Dworkin, *Life's Dominion*. New York: Vintage, 1994; Simon Blackburn, "Salvaging the Sacred" in *Is Nothing Sacred?* Edited by Ben Rogers. London and New York: Routledge, 2003, pp.135–43. The discussion in this book is both informative and interesting.
- 22 Richard Dawkins, "The Sacred and the Scientist" in *Is Nothing Sacred?* Edited by Ben Rogers. London and New York: Routledge, 2003, pp.135–43.
- 23 Gregory E. Kaebnick, "On the Sanctity of Nature" p. 17; in *The Hastings Center Report*, Vol. 30 no. 5 (Sept–Oct, 2000 pp.16–23).
- 24 See The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) at <http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/glossary/tar-ipcc-terms-en.pdf> sv Adaptation.
- 25 The term mitigation is used here in the technical sense accorded it by the IPCC (see previous footnote) as "An *anthropogenic* intervention to reduce the *sources* or enhance the *sinks* of *greenhouse gases*". <http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/glossary/tar-ipcc-terms-en.pdf> sv Mitigation.

CHAPTER 9

Christianity in Africa

From African Independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches¹

Birgit Meyer

Introduction

Ever since African Independent Churches (AICs) became a central research focus for anthropologists in the 1960s, these churches have been major sites for more general theoretical reflection and innovation in anthropology. Classical works published in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Fabian, 1971; Jules-Rosette, 1975; Peel, 1968; Sundkler, 1961) showed how AICs or movements instigated the development of alternatives to the then still dominant structural-functionalist paradigm, which failed to address “social change” in a theoretically adequate way (Fabian, 1981). As this vast interdisciplinary research field has been surveyed up to the mid-1980s (Fernandez, 1978; Ranger, 1986; Jules-Rosette, 1994), this review is confined to the past 25 years, highlighting major trends that have considerably reconfigured, empirically as well as theoretically, the study of Christianity in Africa. Nothing can better evoke what is at stake than the salient contrast between the familiar image of African prophets from Zionist, Nazarite, or Aladura churches, dressed in white gowns, carrying crosses, and going to pray in the bush, and the flamboyant leaders of the new mega-churches, who dress in the latest (African) fashion, drive nothing less than a Mercedes Benz, participate in the global Pentecostal jetset, broadcast the message through flashy TV and radio programs, and preach the Prosperity Gospel to their deprived and hitherto hopeless born-again followers at home and in the diaspora (Marshall Fratani, 2001). The emergence of these new figures suggests that the appropriation of Christianity in Africa has entered a new phase. If in the 1980s AICs attracted African Christians and researchers on grounds of African authenticity, current Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches (PCCs) attract people partly by propagating a “complete break with the past and promise to link them with global circuits” (Meyer, 1998a; Engelke, 2004). Although PCCs have gained followers, scholars have only recently and reluctantly started to study them. Anthropologists were usually attracted by cultural difference and authenticity, whereas

religious scholars had a strong interest in Africanization or “inculturation.” Scholars hesitated to study PCCs because of their transnational circuits and links to American televangelists, and zealotry to proselytize nonbelievers (researchers included).

This chapter seeks to highlight the shift from AICs to PCCs as new foci of empirical study and the conceptual transformations that have emerged. In the first section, I show how anthropologists’ understanding of AICs changed in relation to new approaches in the study of Christianity in Africa. I argue that PCCs’ spectacular rise raises important theoretical questions and requires the problematization of “African” and “Independent.” In the next three sections, I discuss (a) the relationship between Christianity and “traditional religion” and the question of Africanization; (b) the relationship between Africa and “the wider world” and the question of globalization; and (c) the relationship between religion and politics and the question of religion in the public sphere. The point is to show how these frames have been reconfigured in the period under review, and indicate fruitful avenues for further research, especially on the PCCs.

Reconfigurations: From African Independent to Pentecostal Charismatic Churches

Fernandez’s earlier overview (1978) marks the transition in the study of AICs from a focus on typologies and taxonomies and crisis cults to a more critical-reflexive and ethnographic approach. Critiquing earlier socio-structural Marxist-inspired approaches in the 1970s (e.g., Van Binsbergen, 1977, 1981), Fernandez argued: “My point is, and I think it is a very anthropological one, our real enlightenment lies not in the application of imageless ideas exported from the West, but in beginning with African images and by careful method learning what they imply—what is embedded in them” (Fernandez, 1978:215). He expressed his support of the “new historiography” represented by Terence Ranger *cum suis* (Ranger and Kimambo, 1972) and encouraged anthropologists to study African religious imaginations by discerning their inherent “argument of images,” that is, the way in which people face deprivation and achieve revitalization by redeploying “primary images of body and household, field and forest life” (Fernandez, 1978:228). Fernandez’s magisterial study of the syncretist Bwiti religion among the Fang demonstrated the approach and was a subject of much debate (Fernandez, 1990; Schoffeleers, 1986; Werbner, 1985, 1990).

If Fernandez made a strong plea for semantic or symbolic ethnography to replace structural-functionalist approaches, Van Binsbergen and Schoffeleers (1985) argued for an integrative approach to better understand religious movements in Africa. This quest for integration also stood central in two ground-breaking monographs: Jean Comaroff’s *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* (1985) and Karen Fields’s *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa* (1985). Both works, in their own manner, offer insight into African religious practices and symbolic universes based on detailed empirical research that imaginatively explores the relationship between religion and politics without reducing the former to the latter or maintaining a Durkheimian view of religion as underpinning societal order (see also Werbner, 1985). Examining the ways in which the British colonials perceived Watchtower activities in Malawi and Zambia in

the first three decades of the twentieth century as a major political threat, Fields argued that baptism, speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing actually operated as effective political tools. Challenging the often implicit distinction between religion and the secular, her work demonstrates that such a separation was an innovation in colonial Central Africa; thus showing that religion was a continuously contested part of the ideology of colonial modernity.

In her exploration of Tshidis' material and symbolic struggle in the South African–Botswana borderland to act on the global and national forces that shape their lives, Comaroff focused on colonial encounters between western and local forces. She integrated “the imageless concepts of mode of production, class formation, and underdevelopment with a profound exploration of the argument of images in Tshidi Zionism” (Ranger, 1986:12). Comaroff moved beyond Fernandez's rather narrow view of ethnography as geared to African cultural and symbolic repertoires and the essentializing opposition between Africa and the West on which it thrives. This approach underpins hers and John Comaroff's later work (1991, 1997), which reframed ethnography as a thorough study of the Other and a detailed investigation of the zones of contact between Africa and the West. Central to this investigation stand the material, social, and cultural possibilities and constraints articulated in the “long conversations” between western missionaries, traders, administrators, and local people, which took off in colonial times and have continued ever since.

The studies by Fields and Comaroff also signaled the need to situate AICs in a broader historical, social, and cultural frame. As Ranger explained in his sophisticated overview, the treatment of Independent churches, missionary Christianity, and traditional religion in isolation from each other was “artificial and distorting” (1986:49). He stressed that studies of AICs drew too strong a contrast with traditional religion and misrepresented the former as the sole suitable laboratory for social change, whereas the latter was perceived as static and hence merely a nostalgic point of reference doomed to disappear (Ranger, 1993). Ranger also argued that an exclusive focus on AICs implied a far too rigid contrast between presumably more “authentic” AICs and Westernized mainline churches perceived as the ideological superstructure of colonialism and hence as familiar and not worthy of anthropological study (Ranger, 1987). This contrast, he showed, was challenged by the fact that religious revival movements occurred in mainline churches at the grassroots level (e.g., MacGaffey, 1983), whereas AICs experienced processes of institutionalization and routinization, in the course of which “pastors” started to assume a more important role than did the prophets who had initially broken away from mission churches (e.g., Probst, 1989).

Realizing the importance of studying Christianity, or religion, in Africa as a dynamic and interactive field in which AICs, mission or mainline churches and traditional religion engage each other, changed anthropological and theological research. Although many anthropological studies stress pluralism and consider dissenting voices and conflicts (Middleton, 1983; Schoffeleers, 1985, 1994; Werbner, 1989; Maxwell, 1999a; Meyer, 1999), most publications still concentrate on a single movement or organization (Spear and Kimambo, 1999; Blakely et al., 1994). There are few studies of Islam as part of these fields (but see Peel, 2003; Sanneh, 1996), (Maxwell, 1997:147; Hastings, 2000:42). Although scholars broadened their research focus and questioned the

usefulness of the opposition between Western missionary concepts and practices and their indigenous appropriation in AICs, they still used the outmoded term “independent” to designate Christian movements lacking white supervision. Neutral terminology invented to differentiate between “authentic” AICs and “foreign” mission churches, fails to acknowledge the interrelatedness of these organizations.

The study of AICs was reconfigured as scholars considered these churches as part of a broader field and by the salient popularity of new PCCs from the 1970s onward. Initially, scholars ignored African-founded, yet globally oriented, PCCs because of their presumed link with Western conservatives and fundamentalists. This link intrigued Gifford (1987, 1991), prompting him to conduct his early research on the influence of European and American evangelists on PCCs in Southern Africa (Arntsen, 1997). The 2001 edition of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Barrett, 2001, see also Anderson, 2001), indicated that in 2000 there were 83 million Independents and 126 million Pentecostal-charismatics in Africa.

If Christianity appears to be on the wane in (northern) Europe, a new global brand of Pentecostalism thrives in Africa, Latin America, and Asia (Corten, 1997; Droogers, 2001; Freston, 1998; Jenkins, 2002; Lehman, 2001; Martin, 2002; Poewe, 1994). If for good conceptual reasons (Fabian, 1981) anthropologists pleaded to use “movement” rather than “church,” African Christians seemed to prefer church presumably because of its more solid, official connotations. They adopt categories such as mission or mainline church, AIC or PCC. AICs are attacked by the fast-growing PCCs which were founded by and organized around the personality of a charismatic African leader and remained institutionally independent from, though they had strong links to, western Pentecostal churches.

The popularity of Pentecostalism is not an entirely new phenomenon because Pentecostal churches, like the Assemblies of God or the Apostolic Church, were active in Africa since the 1920s and until around 1990 scholars did not distinguish these churches from AICs. Southern African AICs especially developed typical Pentecostal features such as glossolalia (Daneel, 1970; Sundkler, 1961), and scholars took them as paradigmatic of African Pentecostalism (Cox, 1994a,b). Many AICs straddled the typological divide and recast themselves as PCCs (Meyer, 1999; Maxwell, 2001; Ukah, 2003a). What is new is the fact that the hitherto blurred typological distinction between AICs and Pentecostal churches became increasingly polarized in the course of PCCs’ massive expansion.

Therefore, these classifications are part of a politics of self-representation. Pentecostal rhetoric about the disappearance of AICs notwithstanding, these churches persist and attract followers and researchers (Adogame, 2000; Dozon, 1995). Zionist Churches in South Africa still have a mass appeal (Gunnner, 2002; Kiernan, 1992, 1994; Niehaus et al., 2001), PCCs are growing (M. Frahm-Arp, P. Germond, and I. Niehaus, personal communication). PCCs stress the importance of the Holy Spirit above biblical doctrines, accept prophetism, dreams and visions, speaking in tongues, prayer healing, and deliverance from evil spirits. Charismatic Pentecostalism in Africa also materializes in prayer groups in the confines of established Protestant Churches, the charismatic renewal in the Roman Catholic Church, and nondenominational fellowships that born-again Christians attend without leaving their churches (Asamoah-Gyadu, 1997; Ayuk,

2002; Meyer, 1999; Ojo, 1988; Ter Haar, 1992; Milingo, 1984). Therefore, a crude distinction between AICs, PCCs, and mainline churches is as problematic as the earlier “taxonomic games” distinguishing types of AICs, which has been critiqued by Fernandez (1978) and Fabian (1981). Nevertheless, the PCCs of the 1990s are characterized by a distinct form, in terms of scale, organization, theology, and religious practice, and this distinct form warrants investigators seeing them as a new phenomenon (Corten and Marshall Fratani, 2001; Gifford, 1998). They should not be approached as a monolithic entity, as differences in doctrinal emphasis and style exists throughout Africa (Martin, 2002:176). Nonetheless they share significant family resemblances.

What is distinctly new about PCCs is their propagation of the Prosperity Gospel and their strong global inclination. Their names suggests that they aim to develop and maintain international branches in other African countries and the West and to deploy notions of identity and belonging that deliberately reach beyond Africa making them a global phenomenon comparable to similar churches, most notably South America. Much current research on PCCs explores the personal, cultural, political, social, and economic dimensions of being born-again, as well as the ways in which the upsurge of these churches is related to the crisis of the post-colonial nation-state, transnationalism and diasporic culture, the rise of neo-liberal “millennial capitalism” (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2001), and mass-mediated popular culture. If Fernandez (1978) could still state that religious movements though adaptive to modernity “remain community enterprises within, resisting modernization in the capitalist sense” (2001:217), current PCCs do not resist modernization and have eagerly embraced capitalism.

Such empirical shifts demand new theory since many churches act on a transnational scale. Thus, within a span of 25 years, Fernandez’s plea to turn to African imagery as a prerequisite for a true understanding of AICs collided with the realization that the condition for understanding Pentecostalism’s appeal and impact calls for problematizing “African” and “Independent” as taken-for-granted categories (Appiah, 1992; Mudimbe, 1988). Whereas Fernandez’s call to study African religious imaginations was well taken at the time, it became problematic in the end because of the rather essentializing understanding of the attribute “African” on which it depends. The seemingly “un-African,” globally inclined PCCs challenge the usefulness of the notion of “African” as a marker of cultural difference and call for a reformulation of the major discursive contexts through which AICs have been approached.

Christianity and “Traditional Religion”

A major discursive context framing research on AICs is the relationship between Christianity and “traditional religion.” For a long time the research interests of scholars converged on the issue of Africanization, opening up a space for interdisciplinary debate, above all in the *Journal of Religion in Africa*. The key concern in the debate was the search for an “authentic African expression of Christianity” (Mbiti, 1980; Ojo, 1988; Wijsen, 2000). Phrases such as *Traditional Religion and Christianity: Continuities and Conflicts* (Fasholé-Luke et al., 1978) pinpoint a particular discursive context of the

search for “how to be Christians and Africans at the same time,” (Appiah-Kubi, 1981; Baëta, 1968; Mugambi, 1996; Sindima, 1994) and anthropologists’ understanding of AICs as the backbones of African authenticity [or even as “surrogate tribes,” as Fabian (1980) put it critically]. The dualism of these reified categories, Christianity and traditional religion, has been criticized increasingly because it misrepresents African religious traditions as static, mission churches as alien(ating), and AICs as syncretic but rooted in and geared toward traditional culture. Such a view neglects African agency in processes of conversion into mission churches and fails to acknowledge the extent to which AICs actually oppose(d) traditional notions and practices and incorporate(d) key notions “from outside,” as has been documented in many older anthropological studies of AICs (without, however, being sufficiently theorized).

Recently, the notion of Africanization has been problematized. In my historical and ethnographic work on local appropriations of Christianity among the Ewe in Ghana, I have argued (Meyer, 1992, 1999) that it is a mistake to view Africanization as solely confined to AICs or to design it “from above” into new theological programs. Africanization, understood as appropriation of Christianity at the grassroots level, has been an integral component of the spread of missionary Christianity from the outset. This “[A]fricanization from below” came about through processes of both translation into the (Sanneh, 1991) and the diabolization of Ewe religion (as “heathendom”), thereby merging nineteenth-century popular missionary Christianity and local religious practices and ideas. Old gods, spirits, and witchcraft, continued to exist as Christian demons under the auspices of the devil. Hence, in addition to investigating African ideas about God or the positive convergence of African and Christian notions, I suggested that scholars consider also the negative incorporation of the spiritual entities in African religious traditions into the image of the Christian devil as part of local appropriations. In this way, the “old” and forbidden, from which Christians were required to distance themselves, remained available, albeit in a new form (see also Droz, 1997).

Africanization should not be reserved for the AICs, or for theological constructive theology (e.g., Bediako, 1995; but see Onyinah, 2002). Such a broad understanding of Africanization embraces a positive incorporation of tradition and calls for a revision of the view that AICs are the sole sites of successful, “syncretic” combinations of traditional religious and Christian elements. Nevertheless in the period under review here, it seems that a sophisticated treatment of African religious traditions in relation to Christianity is still relatively scarce (but see MacGaffey, 1983; Maxwell, 1999a; Peel, 2003; Schoffeleers, 1994; Werbner, 1989). This lack may be due to the fact that from a Christian perspective, local traditions are often viewed in a temporalizing perspective, which denies traditional religion its “coevalness” (Fabian, 1983) with Christianity, allegedly the religion of modernity par excellence (Meyer, 1998a; Steegstra, 2004), echoing Sundkler’s (1961) view of AICs “as the bridge over which Africans are brought back to heathendom” (1961:297).

More general debates about the “invention” or “imagination of tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983), which stressed that tradition is not about the past and opposed to modernity, but a part of discourses of modernity, shaped the research of scholars of Christianity in Africa. They started to approach traditional beliefs and practices no longer as a given but as actively produced in particular arenas. Investigators argued

that far from simply alienating African converts from their own culture, missionaries and African evangelists produced reified notions of indigenous culture, which affirmed cultural difference and the imagination of distinct tribal or ethnic identities (Meyer, 2002a; Peel, 2003; Steegstra, 2002; Vail, 1989). Conversely, those cultural agents who refer to tradition as a desirable point of reference and basis of cultural pride are often involved in a project of secularizing traditional rituals, thereby turning them into "harmless culture" (Peel, 1994:163).

PCCs' rather merciless rejection of some local cultural traditions is puzzling, as churches fiercely opposing local traditions may be much more indebted to traditional ways of thinking than cultural agents celebrating tradition as cultural heritage (Peel, 1994; Coe, 2000; Hall, 1999; Meyer, 1999; Steegstra, 2004). Although Pentecostals criticize mainline churches for accommodating local culture through Africanization, they dismiss "Spiritual Churches" for drawing on occult forces, allegedly using idolatric elements such as candles and incense, and thus linking up with the "powers of darkness" (Sackey, 2001). Tying into popular narratives about the devil as the head of all the demons that were once cast out from heaven and settled in Africa, many PCCs devote much room to deliverance from the satanic forces, which possess members and cause material and psychic problems in the sphere of health and wealth. In such semi-public or private meetings, Pentecostal pastors and members of the "prayer force" seek to cast out demons by calling on the Holy Spirit to turn the demonically possessed into born-again Christians (Asamoah-Gyadu, 1997:23; Laurent, 2001; Meyer, 1999:155; Onyina, 2002:122–25). Such deliverance sessions occur both in African rural and urban settings (in prayer camps or churches) as well as in PCCs catering to the needs of (often illegal) African immigrants in the diaspora (Van Dijk, 1997, 2002). In a sense, they offer a version of African Christianity that does not make it necessary to (secretly) seek for help outside the confines of the church. Being born-again is perceived as a radical rupture not only from one's personal sinful past, but also from the wider family and village of origin (Engelke, 2004; Laurent, 2001; Marshall-Fratani, 1998; Meyer, 1998a, 1999; Van Dijk, 1992, 1998). Although these churches appeared as heavily anti-traditional, closer investigation reveals that this attribute is problematic, as PCCs take seriously spiritual forces to a much larger extent than do mainline churches, which tend to regard such beliefs as superstitious (albeit on the level of their theologically trained leaders, not at the grassroots level).

The fact that PCCs affirm a negative, inversed image of traditional gods and spirits and allow for spirit possession in the context of deliverance pinpoint a striking inter-relationship between Christianity and local religious views. PCCs' ongoing concern with deliverance shows the very impossibility of their self-ascribed project to "break with the past." Claims to the ultimate power of the Holy Spirit notwithstanding, the despised evil spirits seem to be alive and kicking. It has become clear that, despite the need for analysis on the level of believers' ideas, it would be much too simple for researchers to remain within PCCs' own self-descriptions and take at face value the claim that they lead believers away from their local background. This notion must be analyzed as a conversion narrative, rather than as an achieved state (Engelke, 2004). Pentecostal-charismatic practice ultimately affirms the impossibility for born-again Christians to escape from forces grounded in and emanating from the local. In this

sense, PCCs, while speaking to desires to link up with the wider world and escape the constraints of poverty, articulate Christianity in relation to local concerns.

Whereas, up until now PCCs have mainly referred to local cultural and religious traditions through diabolization or demonization, signs indicate a more positive appreciation of these traditions in charismatic circles. Pentecostal African theologians recently started to reconcile African religious traditions and Christianity in a postmodern synthesis (e.g., Onyinah, 2002). For example, the charismatic leader of the International Central Gospel Church of Accra, Ghana (Gifford, 1994, 1998, 2003; De Witte, 2003), with branches in Africa, seeks to develop the notion of African pride (Otabil, 1992; see also Larbi, 2001). The emergence of new Gospel Music groups that deliberately incorporate traditional signs and symbols into their lyrics and performance suggests that the rather negative attitude toward tradition may be changing (M. de Witte, personal communication). The question is, of course, what to make of this revival of tradition. I would suggest that rather than viewing this apparent revival as a return to the “authentic,” and a take on tradition as rooted in the past, it may be more useful to understand it as a new practice of signification in which tradition features as a cultural style (Ferguson, 1999:96). As anthropologists have successfully deconstructed the modernization perspective, on which the view of tradition as a matter of the past ultimately depended, it has become difficult, though more challenging, to find an appropriate conceptual space for the authentic or the traditional. This is one of the major tasks researchers will face in the future.

Africa and “The Wider World”

Globalization and modernity became the buzz words in the 1990s, making room for interdisciplinary exchange with sociologists of religion (Lehman 2001; Martin 2002), and new possibilities for debates about PCCs unconstrained by area studies (Coleman 2002; Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001; Corten and Mary 2001; Poewe 1994). Africans’ relation to the “modern world” already informed earlier studies of AICs. Much research in the 1960s and 1970s was conducted with the view that modernization would replace indigenous culture and Westernization and secularization would reign. Whether classified as escapist “crisis cults” or as creative Independent movements, AICs were regarded as indicators of Africans balancing between traditional and modern society. References to “traditional religion” and “new nation-states” betray “a notion of society as a normally stable arrangement of structures, roles and institutions” that regarded religious enthusiasm as ultimately disturbing, at least conceptually if not politically (Fabian, 1981[1991]:114). AICs were held to cope with modernization, be it by offering the capacity to “explain, predict and control” the larger macrocosm into which Africans were drawn by colonialism through conversion to the High God (Horton, 1975), or by enabling revitalization through a symbolic experience of “returning to the whole” (Fernandez, 1982). Horton’s intellectualist approach is problematic because it regards the individual quest for knowledge as the prime drive behind and explanation for conversion, neglecting the metaphoric richness of religious thought and action, the emotive appeal of the sacred, and the power of more structural political-economic

processes. Fernandez's position, as outlined above, draws too strong a contrast between African images and the forces of colonialism and modernization.

Anthropology's (re)turn to modernity and globalization in the 1990s is a complex, contested matter which exceeds African studies and cannot be addressed here (see Appadurai, 1996; Inda and Rosaldo, 2002; Kearney, 1995). Researchers of PCCs were pushed to rethink modernity in the context of globalization above all because they were puzzled, on the one hand, by these churches' transnational organizational structure and the outspoken links made between being born-again and going global, and, on the other hand, by the way in which believers' life worlds were shaped by contradictions between political, social, and economic aspirations and possibilities arising from Africa's partial participation in the global economy. The key challenge was to develop a conceptual framework for a more sophisticated understanding of the complicated relationship between modern and traditional, or global and local; thus it became urgent to discover how these seeming oppositions, though called on in PCCs' practice, are actually entangled. It was certainly not a question of returning to the modernization perspective, although researchers, in their eagerness to make sense of PCCs' self-descriptions, may occasionally find themselves relapse into this old discourse. The main concern was to address modernity not from within the paradigm of modernization, but as a critique thereof. Taking as a point of departure critiques of anthropology's bounded notions of culture that question a view of the local as a primal category (Appadurai, 1996; Fabian, 1991, Ch. 10; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997) and the realization that cultural specificity, rather than being opposed to globalization, is an essential component of globalization's dialectics of flow and closure (Clifford, 1988; Meyer and Geschiere, 1999), many anthropologists ventured into ethnographies of modernity. This endeavor, characterized by a dialectical understanding of the relationship between theory and empirical research, seeks to explore how people's encounters with colonialism, missions, or the capitalist market economy take a different shape in different localities. Hence one finds the emphasis on multiple modernities situated at different times and places, rather than on one single teleological structure (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993; Geschiere, 1997). Given the characteristics of PCCs, the framework of ethnographies of modernity was perceived as appealing. In any case, "modernity" proved to be a powerful point of reference, and is also good to disagree with (Englund and Leach, 2000, see below).

Many PCCs present themselves as ultimate embodiments of modernity. Building huge churches to accommodate thousands of believers, making use of elaborate technology to organize mass-scale sermons and appearances on TV and radio, organizing spectacular crusades throughout the country—often parading foreign speakers—so as to convert nominal Christians, Muslims, and supporters of traditional religions, creating possibilities for high-quality Gospel Music, and instigating trend-setting modes of dress all create an image of successful mastery of the modern world (de Witte, 2003, personal observation; Droz, 2001; Hackett, 1998). PCCs owe at least part of their wealth to the fact that they successfully oblige members to pay tithes (10% of their income). To help believers advance, some PCCs offer a small loan to needy members, which should enable them to engage in trade and become financially independent—an aim desirable not only to the person in question but also to the church, as it eventually yields higher donations. Many PCCs represent prosperity as a God-given blessing and

resent the mainline churches for legitimizing poverty by referring to Jesus Christ as a poor man (Marshall-Fratani, 1998; Maxwell, 1998; Meyer, 1997). The figure of the charismatic pastor—with such stars as Nicolas Duncan-Williams and Mensah Otabil (Ghana), Nevers Mumba (Zambia), and most important, Benson Idahosa (Nigeria) as paradigmatic figures—dressed in exquisite garments and driving a posh car pinpoints that prosperity and being born-again are held to be two sides of the same coin.

Indeed, “Your miracle is on the way” is a popular slogan, to be seen on church advertisements, car stickers, and shops all over Africa, which embodies the power of the still unfulfilled yet resilient “expectations of modernity,” which are frustrated by daily experiences of disconnectedness and marginalization (Ferguson, 1999). However, the Prosperity Gospel also risks becoming subverted by its own appeal, in particular if the promise of wealth on which it thrives fails to materialize among believers (Maxwell, 1998:366ff). Numerous scandals show many times over that power and wealth may seduce even the staunchest born-again pastor to go astray (a favorite topic of especially Nigerian video-movies). Smith showed that charismatic Pentecostalism not only tends to reproduce the structures of inequality against which it positions itself (see also Marshall, 1998), but also stands “dangerously close to the world of witchcraft” in that, while critiquing the possibly evil, occult sources of wealth, it is easily suspected to draw on those (Smith, 2001). In Owerri (Nigeria) witchcraft suspicions regarding the wealth of flashy born-again pastors led to public riots, in which the church premises and pastors’ residences were destroyed. More research needs to be conducted to assess the way in which the Prosperity Gospel is at once PCCs’ main attraction and, as the promise in the long run fails to materialize among most ordinary believers, its main weakness. Despite PCCs’ drive for prosperity, the achievement of wealth is moralized by distinguishing between divine and occult sources of wealth. PCCs appear to alert believers not to lose themselves in crude consumptive behavior and to use wisely the money they earn. People should avoid drinking alcohol, leading a loose moral life, and, in the case of men, squandering money with “cheap girls.” They offer elaborate lessons on marriage, which young couples prior to their wedding must attend, and special hours for marriage counseling. Though the issue of gender appears to be pertinent, little research has been conducted in this regard (but see Mate, 2002). The ideal is a moral self, not misled by the glitzy world of consumer capitalism nor misguided by the outmoded world of tradition, but instead filled with the Holy Spirit. Although there is likely much overlap between the Protestant modes of conduct that Max Weber found to be typical of early Protestantism, the strong emphasis on becoming prosperous and showing off wealth distinguishes PCCs from early modern Protestantism. Because the devil is supposed to operate not only through blood ties linking people to their extended family, and local culture, at the heart of modernity in the sphere of consumption, the prospect of prosperity is made to depend on deliverance.

Occult forces, embodied by the Spirit of Poverty, may block the accumulation of capital; seductive powers, as embodied by Mami Water, may induce them to squander their money on petty things such as cosmetics, perfumes, and sweets, whereas witchcraft and ancestral spirits may prevent them from prospering in life (Bastian, 1997; Meyer, 1998a,b; Ukah, 2003b; see also Ellis and Ter Haar, 1998:183ff). Linking up with ongoing debates about the “modernity of witchcraft” in African studies (Ciekawy and

Geschiere, 1998; Geschiere, 1997; Moore and Sanders, 2001), PCCs' witchcraft discourses express the contractions of modernity, its malcontents and promises (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993), and the moral panics to which it gives rise (Marshall, 1991).

As the (prospective) born-again person is PCCs' point of departure to change the world, much research has focused on Pentecostal notions of the self, the way in which members are enticed to write new scripts for their lives. In my own work I tried to show that, as deliverance was understood as "cutting blood ties" (thus preventing jealous family members and demanding spirits to intrude a person), the invasion of the Holy Spirit through whom this severing occurred could be understood as a symbolic creation of a modern individual subject (1999). Although many charismatics are suspicious of the extended family, and "the witches in the village" is a recurrent trope in many sermons, the extent to which PCCs stimulate the genesis of new forms of communality, which may act as a surrogate family, should not be neglected (as emphasized by Van Dijk, 1997, 2002; see also Englund and Leach, 2000:235). As Marshall-Fratani (2001) argues, "it is not so much the individualism of Pentecostal conversion which leads to the creation of modern subjects, but the ways in which its projection on a global scale of images, discourses and ideas about renewal, change and salvation opens up possibilities for local actors to incorporate these into their daily lives" (2001:80; see also Marshall-Fratani and Peclard, 2002). Calling on believers as brothers and sisters in Christ, contemporary PCCs incite imaginations of community that surpass the space of the ethnic group or the nation as these imaginations are delocalized.

This stance materializes in widely available (cassette and video) sermons, music, and literature that circulate in global Pentecostal networks and entice the constitution of a new public of born-again believers with a strong global outlook (Ellis and Ter Haar, 1998). It also plays an important role in the diaspora where many Africans do not have a staying permit and yet are entitled to be married in the church, thereby surpassing national identity politics (Van Dijk, 2002). As Martin put it, "Charismatic Christianity is the portable identity of people in diaspora" (2002:145). So far, however, anthropologists have done little to develop more adequate research methodologies taking into account the transnational dimension of PCCs. They are still mainly studied at one particular location in Africa. One notable exception is Rijk van Dijk, who has researched Pentecostal networks stretching over Europe and Africa and conducted multi-sited fieldwork in Accra, The Hague, and Botswana (1997, 2002, 2006). Although the research presented so far in this section may suggest that PCCs' practices translate smoothly into the notions of modernity and globalization, their use has also triggered debate. Englund and Leach (2000) have criticized anthropological fieldwork on PCCs for being "organized by the meta-narrative of modernity," which draws them into a Western perspective that ultimately fails to capture what actually goes on in these churches. In order to avoid misrepresentation, they advocate "to subscribe to a tradition of realist ethnography in which fieldwork as lived experience is indispensable for the production of anthropological knowledge" (2000:229). Presenting the case of Pentecostals in Chinsapo (Malawi), Englund and Leach caution scholars not to disregard the local particularities with sweeping generalizations about PCCs' attitude toward modernity. I would like to briefly address the relationship they propose between ethnography and theory. Their plea resonates quite well with Fernandez's opposition

of African imaginations and imageless Western concepts. The problem with such a view, as I pointed out earlier is that it is based on an understanding of “African” or, as Englund and Leach call it the “local,” as ontologically prior to and distinct from “the wider world” (Gupta, 2000), and thus as impossible to capture by imageless theoretical frameworks, be it structural-functionalism, Marxism, or modernity. Given that the main reason for turning to modernity (and globalization), as outlined above, was the quest to better grasp how the supposedly “African” or local relates to foreign or global forces without relying on essentializing reifications, Englund and Leach’s theoretical intervention does not have much to offer.

Jean-François Bayart in his reflections (2000:234) on “extraversion,” seeks to surpass the “sterile distinction between the internal dimension of African societies and their insertion in the international system” (see also 1993). Insisting that Africa, in its own way, is a player in the process of globalization, he investigates how initially foreign, colonial forces subjected Africans by constituting them as subjects. Building on Foucault’s insights, Bayart argues that subjectivation, in both senses of the term, occurs most successfully through a non-coercive use of power, as, for instance, was the case with missions that played a key role in generating a new type of person characterized by new internalized modes of conduct perceived as irredeemably constitutive of one’s identity. For Bayart, appropriation is the prime strategy of extraversion; but in his opinion it is not a question of “new wine in old skins,” as was the case in the discursive context of Christianity and traditional religion. Instead, the appropriators themselves change in the process of appropriating new matters through external links. Here external and internal are dialectical categories that continuously erase each other, making it difficult to say what exactly is African. Extraversion, understood in this way, should not however be viewed as innocently creative and positive; rather, as Bayart shows, through appropriation and other strategies of extraversion, Africans also participate(d) dramatically in their own submission, resulting in political turmoil, war, and despair, and the adoption of alternative strategies such as trickery and brute coercion. Against the backdrop of this complex argumentation, which can only be evoked here, it becomes clear that essentialist differences between Africa and the world or the local and the global are impossible to maintain. Accounting for structural constraints and creative appropriation, the notion of extraversion also allows scholars to reconcile an emphasis on narrativity and agency (Peel, 1995) with attention paid to the “long conversation” initiated by the dynamics of newly emerging power structures (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991).

Bayart’s approach is useful to the study of Christianity in general (Peel, 2003) and PCCs in particular. Gifford (1998:308), observes: “[F]or all the talk within African circles of localisation, inculturation, Africanisation or indigenisation, external links have become more important than ever.” Extraversion being both a practice in place to incorporate external material and spiritual matters and a method of surviving, “Africa’s newest Christianity, while in many ways reinforcing traditional beliefs, also serves . . . as one of Africa’s best remaining ways of opting into the global order” (1998:321). Corten and Marshall-Fratani (2001), Maxwell (2000) and, somewhat surprisingly against the backdrop of his earlier stance, Englund (2003) have drawn similar conclusions. There is a danger, though, of overemphasizing the creative and positive aspects of extraver-

sion, which would bring the notion disturbingly close to earlier approaches toward Africanization in the sense of tradition-oriented wholeness and harmony. In many respects, the study of PCCs has little eye for the possibly disorienting, unsettling, and destructive implications of born-again Christianity, the contradictions on which it thrives and the disappointments it generates (Behrend, 1999; Marshall-Fratani, 2001; Smith, 2001). This omission may have to do with the fact that the anthropology of religion as a whole is still biased toward an understanding of religion as stabilizing above all, in that it offers modes of orientation, control, and a secure place to feel at home.

Religion and the Public Sphere

If the two discursive contexts presented so far struggled, in different ways, with the question of the relationship between Africa and the world, the last to be presented here is organized along somewhat different faultlines: the relationship between Christianity and politics, or, in more general terms, religion and the secular. AICs' political dimension has fascinated scholars for a long time and debates on religion and politics tend to downplay one at the expense of the other (Ranger, 1986). Some scholars saw AICs as proto-nationalist organizations, and others regarded them as inferior to political activity. Yet, Ranger (1986:6) noted, "few can study these movements without feeling that even if they were not unequivocally anti-colonial they constituted a form of politics. The entangled connection of religion and politics continued to inform debates about questions of resistance and domination. In these debates the understanding of resistance, and for that matter politics, was broadened to encompass the sphere of everyday life.

Comaroff (1985:191), for instance, presented Tshidi Zionism under apartheid as constructing a "systematic counterculture, a *modus operandi* explicitly associated with those estranged from the centers of power and communication". Because afflicted people served as metonyms for the whole group, healing and deliverance from evil spirits was not merely individual, but rather involved collective restorative work. Zionists did not stimulate collective political action because they lacked opportunity to protest openly. Therefore, the powerless protested within the domain of everyday practice. Although Zionism could only mediate societal contradictions, but not transcend them, it did not turn Tshidi into docile servants of Apartheid, but instead enabled them to express symbolic resistance against the system. Schoffeleers (1991), building on similar data, argued that the Zionist churches and healing churches in general, instilled political quiescence in their members—a position which evoked much disagreement (Gunner, 2002:6 ff.) The differences here stretched "the semantics of the political" (Gunner, 2002:7) and developed into more complex reflections on processes of domination and control, in terms of Gramsci's notion of hegemony (see Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991) or Bayart's notion of extraversion.

In my view, the relation between religion and politics is much more complicated than is highlighted in debates about the kind and extent of AICs' resistance. Scholars recognized that because power is always "rooted in the fusion of the secular and sacred worlds" (Akyeampong, 1996:167), it was impossible to disentangle religion and politics. They reflected on religion and politics in a modern framework, which stressed that

both belonged to separate spheres. In retrospect, one can observe that the master narrative of secularization, which, if implicitly, informed theorizing about AICs' politics, collided with the pressing realization that secularization was not the dominant idea in Africa. Fields's (1985) study highlighted this contradiction by showing that even in the colonial administration, a modern site par excellence, it was impossible to contain Christianity in a private realm. It went disturbingly public.

If research on AICs' politics has mainly explored symbolic forms of resistance, the new PCCs of the 1990s, in the age of democratization and liberalization, posed new questions about Christianity's public role (Gifford, 1998; Haynes, 1996). Gifford's (1998) pioneering work on Christianity's public role in Ghana, Uganda, Zambia, and Cameroon articulates the paradox by arguing that while Christianity's public role has declined in modern society, Christianity may be taking on an increasing role in the formation of a modern and pluralistic state. The fate of the postcolonial state with its run-down structures of governance, failure to achieve legitimacy, and its loosening grip on "civil society" as a result of IMF's pressure for "good governance" and "democratization," facilitates PCCs' appeal to people because they easily link up with popular world views, which assert the power of invisible forces to impinge on the visual realm and thus readily match with Pentecostalism's emphasis on evil spirits and deliverance.

The question of how to appreciate PCCs' politics is a matter of debate. The political scientist Haynes (1996) sees PCCs as catering to the real needs of the people and countering the woes of modernization; Gifford is more reserved. Critiqued by mainline churches for their irrational outlook and political opportunism, PCCs easily "walk the corridors of power" (Gifford, 1998:341) and align themselves with the government, as numerous examples given by Gifford show. Conversely, those in power may parade their born-again identity, as was the case for Zambia's President Chiluba or Benin's President Kérékou. Nevertheless, here too, it is problematic to generalize, as different charismatic pastors adopt different stances toward politics and the government (as, for example, the case of the Ghanaian Mensa Otabil, who was a fierce critic of the Rawlings government, shows, whereas other charismatics aligned themselves with Rawlings) and PCCs' members' attitudes toward politics has hardly been subject to research. Recently, the question of PCCs' attitude toward democracy has become a new research focus which, for instance, materialized in a program funded by the Pew Foundation "Evangelicals and Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America," with Ranger acting as the head of the African dimension of the program (Ranger, 2003). The link between anthropological and political science approaches in research on PCCs and the re-contextualization of this research in a global frame is laudable. Yet, an all-too-easy slippage into the discursive frameworks of democracy and civil society—the current catch words of global development circuits—needs to be resisted because these notions are often employed in a Eurocentric and normative way that is not helpful in understanding politics in Africa.

The most important feature of Gifford's analysis is the suggestion to investigate PCCs' popularity against the backdrop of the shifting role of the state in Africa. Whereas in the era of one-part dictatorial regimes (aptly analyzed by Mbembe, 2001) the state sought to contain Christianity outside the public realm (and often fiercely resented mainline churches' criticisms leveled against its politics), the situation changed significantly with the onset of democratization and liberalization, when politicians (to be)

voted into power depended on the consent of their often largely born-again constituencies. In such a situation, becoming Pentecostal may be a seductive political strategy, although, as Phiri (2003) has shown, declaring Zambia a Christian nation was of no help for the born-again president Chiluba to stay in power. It is fruitful to proceed along these lines in the future because the rise of particular PCCs and their public role can be understood only in reference to the reconfiguration of the political field in general, and the state in particular (Marshall-Fratani, 1998).

The important public role of PCCs testifies to the fact that secularization, which claims an intrinsic link between modernization and the decline of the public importance of religion, is inadequate to understand PCCs' attraction and impact on the political as well as personal level. What is likely at stake is the way in which charismatic movements impinge on the imagination of communities, which was once the privileged sphere of the nation-state (Anderson, 1991). Although our world is a world of nation-states, current African politics shows the incapacity of postcolonial states to bind the citizens into the vision of the nation. The constant occurrence of wars and terror in Africa—presented as a seemingly natural feature that does not even call for explanation in much press footage—pinpoints that the state seems to reach its limits in the face of both small-scale autochthonous incentives and transnational movements such as political Islam or PCCs. Many PCCs (as well as Islamist movements) have been found to appropriate keenly new electronic media that, in a context of media deregulation, allow for an active role in identity politics with many implications (Marshall-Fratani, 1998; Meyer, 2004; Bastian, 2001; Hackett, 1998; see also Lyons, 1990; Lyons and Lyons, 1991; de Witte, 2003). This raises political questions relating to the PCCs' contribution to an emerging Christian public culture. It will be interesting to watch how opponents like neo-traditionalists responds to the emerging culture that has a strong Pentecostal touch (Meyer, 2004).

In the future, scholars should compare PCCs in Africa and other continents and conduct grounded investigations of the different voices in context such as Islam, neo-traditional movements, and charismatic Christianity. It is also important to examine how religions play into current identity politics, in their attempts to overcome the limits of the state through the use of new media tools to assume a public voice. The point is to examine how opposing religious communities adopt similar media tactics (as the striking similarities between the charismatic Muslim leader Haidara in Mali (Schulz, 2003) and Mensa Otabil (de Witte, 2003; Gifford, 2003) suggest). In paying attention to the shifting role and place of religion in Africa, which motivates much current research, anthropologists should critically investigate the notion of religion itself. Asad (1993) argues that understanding religion in terms of "inner belief" is historically situated in Western Christianity and cannot be applied to different religious traditions that may, for example, place more emphasis on ritual and materiality. Much research on PCCs, however, refers to the religious dimension in terms of a deeply seated inner belief that constitutes the, in a sense, ungraspable power of religion, thereby reaffirming a definition of religion as a separate sphere (e.g., Ellis and Ter Haar, 1998; Englund, 2003; Hackett, 1986). Although it is important to pay attention to PCCs' power to evoke deeply felt emotions and to mediate experiences of the supernatural, a universal definition of religion must be resisted. As Martin (2002) argues, for instance, certain

features such as the strong notions of the “mobile self” and the “portability of charismatic identity” raise the question of whether Pentecostalism represents “postmodern religion” *par excellence*.

Concluding Remarks

The main aim of this review has been to show how the shift from AICs, as prime focus of study, to PCCs in the 1990s impinged on three discursive frames that shaped, yet were transformed by, the study of Christianity in Africa. Echoing a more general trend in anthropology (and cultural studies), researchers' relative certainties about the classifications and categories in use—as well as their usefulness—gave way to, albeit contested, processes of de-essentializing such notions as African, authentic, or local, de-temporalizing tradition, deconstructing modernization, multiplying modernity, blurring the boundary between religion and politics, and even de-universalizing religion. Of course, as I have tried to argue, these deconstructions happened for good reasons as, in a sense, the object of study itself seemed to demand these conceptual “liquidations.” And yet, paradoxically, researchers' growing uneasiness about fixed categories and qualifications does not seem to be paralleled in the world they study. The openings facilitated by the acceleration of flows of people, goods, and ideas, the intensification of global links across national borders, and the compression of time and space seem to call into being new boundaries. Attempts to de-exoticize Africa and grasp its entanglement with “the wider world” notwithstanding; it is equally clear that many Africans experience being marginalized and “forgotten.” The mass appeal of PCCs can be explained, at least in part, against this backdrop. Adopting a strategy of extraversion, which deliberately develops external links and promises connection with the world, PCCs nevertheless have to address a politics of identity and belonging, in which fixed markers govern processes of in- and exclusion, both in Africa and the diaspora. The challenge for the future is not only to understand what charismatic religion can and cannot do in such configurations, but also to grasp the power of identity without naturalizing it, to deconstruct reifications without neglecting their power. The call for solid ethnography is as pertinent as ever.

Afterword

Since the publication of my review in 2004, research on Pentecostalism has expanded. It has become a “hot” topic, addressed in many panels and conferences and studied at new research centers. Research on PCCs has been at the forefront of theoretical innovation. All these new research initiatives and issues warrant an extensive discussion. This afterword seeks to address two interrelated, critical issues pertaining to my review.

First, signaling a shift in scholarly attention from AICs to PCCs, I addressed the conceptual challenges implied by this shift. The issues raised certainly have been central to the scholarly work I reviewed. However, I now realize that I may have confounded the shift towards PCCs in the attention of scholars with an actual disappearance of

AICs. While there is evidence for AICs refashioning themselves as PCCs (and thus doing away with material paraphernalia such as gowns, incense, white candles, see Ukah, 2008), not all AICs take this direction. In a perceptive discussion in Africa, Matthew Engelke (2007, 2010) has pointed at the potentially reductive aspects of the timeframe mobilized in my review, according to which PCCs would be placed at the vanguard of religious developments, making it seem as if the future of Christianity would be for the Pentecostals. I agree with Engelke that as scholars we need to be careful not to reproduce in our scholarly analyses PCCs' own vision as being the latest and ultimate form of Christianity and slip into some sort of celebratory discourse that regards AICs as not "coeval" (Fabian, 1983) with PCCs, presuming that this and other forms of Christianity are being doomed to disappear with the course of time. Time is not a neutral category, but framed within a particular politics of use. In fact, the Pentecostal use of time itself, and the ways in which this differs from timeframes mobilized by other Christian churches, would warrant far more attention than it has received so far. This would not only imply taking seriously Pentecostal claims of "making a complete break with the past," but also devoting attention to their own view of history (and the future), and exploring how this relates to alternative uses of time by other religious and secular groups.

Second, we need to devote more attention to the limits of Pentecostalism and create some room for critique. A viable starting point here is the recent concern with "fake" pastors. In my own research location, Ghana, over the past years there have been countless rumors about born-again pastors, who secretly owe their powers to African shrines, involve themselves in immoral acts, such as sexual abuse, and squander money (Shipley, 2009; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2009). A particularly evocative case concerns Kwaku Bonsam, who hit the news in 2008 for exposing a Pentecostal pastor for invoking traditional powers, challenging him to take part in a public competition over spiritual power. While the dismissal of certain pastors as "fake" still affirms that at least some pastors are "genuine," such second thoughts about Pentecostal charismatic leaders, and the fabulous wealth assembled by them, reveals doubts about the capacity of these leaders to live up to their claims and promises. Such doubts are also expressed by those moving out of PCCs, or migrating from one church to the other, in search of an ultimate solution to their problems (Frahm-Arp, 2010). As long as scholarly attention mainly focuses on why and how people enter rather than leave PCCs, their appeal receives undue attention at the expense of frustrations and disappointments. Taking seriously complaints and second thoughts that point towards internal contradictions would be a viable starting point for a nuanced critique of Pentecostalism, based on people's own experiences and ideas. The point here is to develop a keen eye on the cracks, loose ends and paradoxes that reveal certain limits of PCCs' capacity to achieve what they claim.

We need to rethink the limitations of the framework of modernity and modernization for analyzing PCCs. I argue (Meyer, 2007, 2010) that analyzing these churches through Weber's "Protestant ethic" thesis is productive in some respects, but may blind us to other relevant aspects. I think the link between current neo-liberal capitalism and PCCs amounts to more than a replay of Weber's "Protestant Ethic." While PCCs are excellent—though not the sole—sites for investigating religion in our global age, we should not be too sure about its "Protestant" character and effects. The emphasis on

the Prosperity Gospel and the conspicuous display of wealth by pastors collides with the proverbial Protestant asceticism, suggesting that we rethink the nexus of Pentecostalism, pleasure, and consumption. While a Pentecostal perspective is necessary to grasp PCCs' appeal, we also need to explore Pentecostalism's limits from a distance and resist anchoring our analyses of PCCs in narrow definitions of our topic and research agendas. We need to relate their rise (and downfall) to other religious traditions maintain a fresh outlook that could yield new theoretical insights via a critical interrogation of our own assumptions.

Note

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PART II

Interpreting Religious Pluralism

CHAPTER 10

Neo-traditional Religions

Marleen de Witte

The Term Neo-traditional Religion

Throughout Africa and throughout colonial and postcolonial history new religious movements that (re)turn to indigenous religious beliefs and practices have appeared and flourished (and sometimes also disappeared again). These movements are commonly referred to in the literature as neo-traditional religious movements, but there are surprisingly little in-depth studies of their dynamics in present-day Africa. This chapter pleads for taking more seriously the existence and development of such movements as a non-negligible phenomenon in African religious landscapes.

The term “neo-traditional” is a pleonasm: the very category of “tradition” is already “neo” in that it is a product of “modernity” and thus entails a reformulation as “tradition” of what existed before. I propose to use the term to denote a conscious renewal and revival of what is (often selectively) considered to be “tradition” and to distinguish this move from traditional or indigenous religious expressions that lack this reflexive aspect.¹ Neo-traditional religious movements strive for the rehabilitation of indigenous religious traditions in new forms that are relevant to the present and future context. Such groups and their deliberate appeal to what they take to be “traditional” or “indigenous” religions are thus part and parcel of the experience of modernity. Indeed, modernity and globalization are the *sine qua non* of the very attraction of “tradition” and the emergence of neo-traditionalism. Leaders and followers of such movements are often motivated by a zeal to defend things “African” in response to a perceived contempt for indigenous traditions or an alienation resulting from increasing “westernization.” A sense of loss experienced in the encounter with the power of global culture urges an effort to conserve and revive. In the past, the restoration of dignity to “local culture” was directed especially against the representatives of colonial power and missionary Christianity. At present, it is increasingly Africans themselves, especially born-again Christians and zealous Muslims, who are perceived as a threat to indigenous

culture and tradition. The renewed assertion of publicity for indigenous religions often comes as a response to the increasing marginalisation of indigenous religious practices with the advance and public presence of radical Christianity and Islam. Also, many neo-traditional groups explicitly seek public recognition for traditional religion as a “religion” to counter global and local Christian-derived stereotypes that frame it as “fetish,” “juju,” or “black magic.”

Despite a shared commitment to mobilizing followers behind “African tradition” to challenge “foreign” religions as well as the perceived injustices of colonial and post-colonial states, neo-traditional religious movements are extremely diverse in terms of background, teachings, practices, development, and followers. It is important therefore to avoid speaking of or searching for the “essence” of neo-traditional groups. The question is whether we can even group them together in one category and what we could gain or would lose by doing so. Elizabeth Isichei (1996) distinguished between movements founded by the educated in the name of cultural patriotism and neo-traditional ritual groups, which incorporate Christian elements in an older worldview and praxis. I would suggest speaking of a spectrum, with at one end movements such as Godianism in Nigeria and the younger Afrikania Mission in Ghana, which were consciously created by the educated. These groups are urban based, nationalist, and are characterized by an intellectual and strongly ideological approach to traditional religion. They are hardly concerned with spirit powers, healing ritual, or witchcraft eradication, but with public representation. They consciously make use of media to promote their cause and have gained considerable public voice and visibility. They have been less successful in attracting mass followings. At the other end of the spectrum we find neo-traditional ritual cults with a strong emphasis on spiritual forces and ritual action. They tend to be confined to one ethnic group and locality, are based in or emerged from rural areas, but have often demonstrated greater vitality and powers of survival than the intellectualist movements. Isichei (1996) describes the Igbe cult in western Niger Delta, which incorporates traditional symbolism (kaolin and secret language) together with Christian elements (the Bible as a cult object, congregational worship). Like many other such movements, it is mainly concerned with witchcraft eradication.

Many neo-traditional groups can be placed somewhere in between on this scale and combine elements of both sides or shift emphasis over the course of their development. Some have a local or regional vision of revitalization of indigenous religion; others are nationally or Pan-African oriented. Some have/had links to national governments; others emerged as protest movements against national states. Examples from East-Africa include Mumboism, Dini ya Msambwa, and Karing’a in colonial Kenya (Gecaga, 2007; Ogot and Ochieng, 1972; Shadle, 2002) and Mungiki in present-day Kenya (Gecaga, 2007; Wamue, 2001). In Southern Africa, the Church of the Black Ancestors in Malawi (Schoffeleers, 1985) called for a return to the religion of the ancestors and developed into a mass movement in the mid-seventies. In Central Africa, the Bwiti cult originating with the Fang people of Gabon fused traditional ancestral cults with Christian symbolism, theology, and prophetic leadership by a messiah. The examples of religious groups that have in one or the other way set as their goal to defend and promote African tradition are indeed too numerous to mention here.

This chapter presents a case study of the Ghanaian Afrikania Mission, based on a total of sixteen month of anthropological fieldwork between 2000 and 2004. The movement is not to be taken as representative of neo-traditional religious movements in Africa. After introducing the organization, however, four relational aspects of the Afrikania Mission will be discussed that are not only crucial for understanding the precarious position of this particular movement in the wider social, religious and political field, but can also be relevant, to various extents, to other neo-traditional groups: its relationship to 1) the state and national politics; 2) Christianity; 3) the media; and 4) indigenous shrines. The analysis of these issues will establish the following points:

- The revitalization of African traditional religion is not to be understood as a step back from or a rejection of “modernity,” but as an inherently modern phenomenon.
- Neo-traditional religious movements are not isolated phenomena, but are part of a broader religious field and their development should be understood in interaction with other religious movements.
- Neo-traditional religion is also an inherently global phenomenon; its appeal to local traditions and the ways in which these are articulated are intimately connected to the global spread of world religions such as Christianity and Islam. At present, neo-traditionalist leaders and movements explicitly manifest themselves in a globalized setting.

The Afrikania Mission in Ghana

The Afrikania Mission was founded in 1982 by an ex-Catholic priest, Kwabena Damuah, with the aim of reforming and reviving Afrikan Traditional Religion (ATR) as a modern world religion, a source of African pride and strength, and a religious base for political nationalism and pan-Africanism. Afrikania Mission is strongly ideological, emphasizing cultural renaissance and black emancipation. To counter the Christian hegemony and popular prejudice against indigenous religions and restore dignity to “the religion of Afrika,” the movement seeks to mobilise and unite all different cults and shrines in the country, and ultimately, the continent. Considering the great variety and ethnic specificity of, and sometimes even rivalry between different deities and their cults, this is a significant, but challenging move. Afrikania's aim of transcending ethnic boundaries is one of the major predicaments the movement faces.

Two aspects are central to the foundation of the movement in 1982: the historical and political connection with Flight Lieutenant J.J. Rawlings' 31st December Revolution in 1981 and the Catholic background of the founder Kwabena Damuah. After seven years working as a Roman Catholic priest, Damuah furthered his studies in the United States, acquiring a Ph.D. in theology at Howard University in 1971.² During his twelve-year study and teaching stay in the US he got inspired by the African-American emancipation movement and issues of Black experience, Black Power, identity, and dignity. Upon his return to Ghana in 1976, many saw him as a “controversial revolutionary”

and a “rebel” and his efforts to “Africanize” Catholic mass—for example through incorporating local drumming—brought him into conflict with his bishop (Gyanfosu, 1995). A few years later Rawlings invited him to take part in his revolutionary Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC). Damuah accepted, against the wish of the Catholic bishops, but left the government not long afterwards to concentrate on the spiritual, cultural, religious, and moral aspects of nation building. On 22 December 1982, he resigned from the Catholic Church and inaugurated the Afrikania Mission with a press conference at the Arts Centre (now Centre for National Culture) in downtown Accra. The following Sunday, 26 December, Afrikania was “spiritually outdoored” (Gyanfosu, 2002:273) with a worship service at the same venue. After these two widely publicized events, Damuah and his handful of followers started a nation-wide “crusade” to spread Afrikania’s message and open branches in all of the country’s regions. In less than a year Damuah claimed branches in all the ten regions of Ghana, in four African countries, in two European countries and two branches in the USA (Gyanfosu, 2002). Many of these branches, however, lived a short life, while many other new branches were started.

In order to reaffirm an “African” religious culture and create a new “African” self-consciousness, Afrikania embarked on a project of reforming and establishing African traditional religion as a “world religion.” This involved the creation of a “systematic and coherent doctrine for Ghanaians and Africans in the diaspora” out of selected indigenous religious beliefs, such as the recognition of multiple deities and spirits, elements of ancient Egyptian religion and civilization, most notably the Sun God Amen-Ra or Ra as “our supreme Creator and universal almighty God,” and Christianized forms, such as holy scriptures (*The Divine Acts*, Ameve, n.d.), authorized prophets, an official creed, and a list of commandments. Damuah also institutionalized the weekly performance of a Sunday worship service according to a standardized liturgy equally consisting of a mix of local, ancient Egyptian, and Christianized elements.

Under Damuah’s leadership, the Afrikania Mission was briefly affiliated to Godianism, a very similar organization of African traditional religion that was started much earlier, in 1948, in Nigeria. Founded by Chief K.O.K Onyioha (Onyioha 1980), an Igbo, it incorporated the earlier National Church of Nigeria and Arousa. Like the Afrikania Mission, it was an attempt to found a modern inter-ethnic Pan-African religion based on an African Supreme God as understood in ancient Egyptian sources. It attracted considerable publicity in the 1970s. Despite the overlaps between Afrikania and Godianism, which initially drew the leaders together, the differences in vision between them turned out to be too difficult to overcome and the ties were broken.

In 1992, two events took place that had great implications for Afrikania’s course over the decade that followed. The first was the turn to democracy in Ghanaian national politics and consequently the break of Afrikania’s ties with the government, which will be dealt with in the next section. The second was the death of Afrikania’s founder Damuah and his eventual succession by Osofo Kofi Ameve. After Damuah’s funeral, Afrikania first seemed to disappear from the public stage because of an internal conflict and eventually a split over who should be the new leader. Although this conflict was still being fought out in court and in the newspapers at the time of my stay, Osofo Komfo Kofi Ameve, a building contractor by profession, became widely recognized as Afrikania’s legitimate leader and successfully asserted himself (although not uncontested)

as the mouthpiece of traditional religion in Ghana.³ Ameve's Ewe identity greatly influenced the ethnic composition of the movement, with Ewe members now being dominant (about 80%) and Ewe being the main local language spoken.

Under Ameve's leadership, Afrikania embarked on a process of growing public presence and getting established as a religious organisation. In 1997, 1999, and 2000 it organized public mass conventions of ATR in Accra and Kumasi, mobilizing great numbers of traditionalists. In addition, Afrikania established its public presence by celebrating its 20th anniversary with two days of spectacular public ceremonies covered by radio, television, and the press, building a huge, new headquarters (the opening of which was part of the 20th anniversary celebrations), founding the "Afrikania Priesthood Training School," publicly ordaining sixty newly trained priests and priestesses (also as part of the celebrations), and adopting an "evangelization" programme of mobilizing traditionalists and establishing branches throughout the country and abroad. Due to the loss of government backing and the rise of charismatic-Pentecostal churches in the 1990s, competition with other religious groups has grown. Afrikania increasingly manifested itself in the public sphere and during Ameve's time started to establish a strong public presence on its own.

When Ameve died in 2003, he was succeeded by Osofo Komfo Atsu Kove. Unlike Afrikania's first two leaders Atsu Kove is not an ex-Christian who "converted" to ATR out of intellectual conviction. He was born in a traditional religious family in Togo and has never gone to any church before. This may make a big difference for Afrikania, especially for the relationship with traditional shrines, which will be discussed below. To what extent, however, remains to be seen.

State and Politics

In contrast to many other neo-traditional religious movements, which often emerged as protest movements against colonial and post-colonial regimes, the Afrikania Mission was for the first decade of its existence closely linked to the government, albeit a revolutionary government in the beginning. The PNDC-Revolution under the leadership of the charismatic and populist Jerry John Rawlings was a turning point in the nationalist crisis caused by corruption, incompetence, and mismanagement of the previous regimes. Committed to "people's participatory democracy," the new government's decentralization politics, aimed at actively engaging the people in the project of nation building and development, revived, initially, nationalist ideals among broad strata of the population. Popular enthusiasm for the Revolution soon decreased when severe economic problems forced the PNDC to take unpopular measures. Seeing religion and nation building as always belonging together, Damuah wanted to carry the new nationalist moral further and give it a religious inspiration to create a deeper motivation. The cultural, religious, and spiritual redemption that Afrikania preached was (and still is) seen as a necessary condition for true political independence. Afrikania was an explicitly nationalist movement with a strong political vision on African identity and national development and shared the radical anti-Western and anti-Christian ideology of the Revolution.

Rawlings supported Damuah's initiative with a car, a public address system, a press conference (at Afrikania's inauguration), and airtime on state radio. His moral support consisted of frequent visits to Afrikania's services and encouraging speeches (Boogaard, 1993:35). As a result, the movement was widely perceived as the cultural-religious corollary of the Revolution (Gyanfosu, 2002:271). Yet, the common ideologies and Rawlings' initial support did not mean that the movement received broad support from the PNDC-government. The Christian majority of the PNDC was very suspicious of Afrikania, and Rawlings' public sympathy for Afrikania soon decreased. Nevertheless, in the perception of the public, Afrikania remained strongly connected to the PNDC.

In 1992 democratic elections were held in Ghana, and although Rawlings remained in power, this led to a break of Afrikania's relations with the state, as the government from now on depended more on other powerful (religious) groups in society. In the competition for votes and popular support, the government especially needed the support of the increasingly popular and influential Pentecostal and charismatic churches. Rawlings gradually embraced Christianity and even Pentecostalism—though according to Afrikania leaders under the influence of his wife, Nana Konadu. As a result, the state's cultural policy of supporting traditional culture moved to the background. Moreover, Rawlings let go of the radical anti-western rhetoric of his early years in power and adopted a more western-oriented approach in order to receive International Monetary Fund and World Bank support.

Where in the past Afrikania was, for obvious reasons, very uncritical and unconditionally supportive of the state and its leadership (Boogaard, 1993:155), after 1992 it became increasingly critical of the state and its cultural policy, especially since the liberal New Patriotic Party government came to power in the 2000 elections, resulting in a further loss of state support for traditional culture. Ameve accused the state of being made up of only born-again Christians and criticised the government, foreign embassies, and NGOs for corrupting traditional values and imposing foreign religious beliefs. For Afrikania, the ultimate proof of the hypocrisy of the state's cultural policy is the fact that the National Commission on Culture is entirely made up of Christians. Afrikania unsuccessfully put pressure on the government to change the situation. It also publicly urged the government to stop "Christian indoctrination" of children in public schools (through daily prayers) and fiercely raised its voice after a government minister called for the abolishment of libation at public functions. Although Ameve shared his political commitment to African selfhood and consciousness with his predecessor Damuah, his harsh criticism of the government thus differed radically from that of Damuah. Atsu Kove appears to follow more or less the same critical line as Ameve did.

Christianity

A common characteristic of neo-traditional religious movements across Africa seems to be an ostensible rejection of Christianity, on the grounds that it is foreign, oppressive of African values, mentally enslaving, misleading, and/or morally corrupt.⁴ At the same time, however, many such groups incorporate Christian elements in one or the other way. Afrikania's relationship to Christianity has always been characterized by a

paradoxical combination of an anti-Christian attitude and appropriation of Christian forms. On the one hand, its promotion of ATR as a modern world religion is framed very much in opposition (and hence in reference) to Christianity. Afrikania maintains that Christianity can never sustain the development of the Ghanaian nation and the African continent, because Christianity is “inherently foreign to Afrikans” and “used to oppress and exploit Afrikans.” Although after the death of the founder there has been an internal conflict over whether Afrikania was meant to be an African form of Christianity or a non-Christian African religion, Afrikania has taken an explicit non-Christian stance and fights against the hegemonic status of Christianity in Ghana’s public domain (especially through the implicit connection between Christianity and education) and argues for the public recognition of ATR as a world religion in its own right. With the rise of charismatic churches and their explicit rejection of traditional religion, Afrikania has also become more militant in its anti-Christian attitude.

At the same time, however, Christianity has, in its changing dominant forms, provided the format for Afrikania’s religion in several ways (see De Witte, 2004). The “creation of a systematic and coherent doctrine for Ghanaians and Afrikans in the diaspora” and its framing of traditional religion in terms of beliefs, symbols, and commandments imply a Christian concept of religion. Indigenous religious traditions in Africa are organized around practices of communicating with spirit beings, rather than around creeds and doctrines. Christian influence is also evident in Afrikania’s regular congregational worship service on Sundays, which is clearly modeled after a Catholic mass and was unknown in pre-Christian ritual behavior. At present, charismatic Christianity, being the dominant and most publicly present religion, has become the model for religion as such and also for Afrikania. The Mission now also organizes public conventions, evangelization, camp meetings, all night prayers, and displays a general preoccupation with public visibility and audibility in the form of electronically amplified sermons and music, huge and brightly colored headquarters with a copious office for the leader, roadside signboards, banners announcing events, a church logo (with a globe), a calendar with pictures of the building and the leader, and a printed cloth and head ties for members to buy. In competition with spiritual healing offered by Pentecostal churches, Afrikania also provides “spiritual consultation,” a new service that attracts mainly Christians and reflects a much broader, renewed emphasis on the power of African spirits that gained legitimacy with the Pentecostal boom in the 1980s and 1990s. The relationship between Afrikania and Christianity can thus be characterized by a paradoxical dialectics of opposition and mutual influence.⁵

Media

Public representation has been at the core of Afrikania’s very project. From its birth at a press conference in 1982, the recurring concern has been to promote ATR to “the people,” “the general public,” or “the rest of mankind.” To this end the leadership has always made use of mass media—first radio and print and later audiovisual media—and has established a strong public voice. Initially, Afrikania leaders’ main strategies of mobilization and public representation were writing and publishing tracts, giving

speeches and organizing rallies that were reminiscent of political ones. Afrikania also published its own newspaper, the *Afrikania Voice*, although this was very irregular and only a few issues appeared. From 1986 Afrikania was granted free airtime and had a weekly radio broadcast replete with revolutionary rhetoric on GBC2, the English language station. Being the only religious group granted airspace on state radio, its program, in which Damuah explained Afrikania's objectives and ideologies, reached a large audience throughout the nation.

Shifting relations between the media, the state, and religion, however, have complicated Afrikania's access to the media and have altered the frames and formats upon which Afrikania can draw. Due to Afrikania's loss of government support and the commercialization of the media scene, Afrikania now has to pay for airtime, just as any other religious organization, but does not have the means to do so. It thus stopped its own broadcast and now tries to find other ways into the media, most notably speaking in radio and TV talk shows, inviting the press to newsworthy Afrikania events and press conferences, sending letters to the editors, and being the subject of TV documentaries (De Witte, 2005a). With the proliferation of visual media, public image has become increasingly important. Not able to produce its own programs any longer, Afrikania depends on the interests of journalists and (often commercial) media houses. It has hardly any control over the messages and images they produce and often complains about the Christian bias of the media and their "misrepresentation" of ATR.

Another challenge is that Afrikania's eager use of modern mass media for its project of representing a group of otherwise unrepresented religious adherents in the public sphere is met with caution by exactly those people that the movement claims to represent: priests, priestesses, and devotees of indigenous shrines. For Afrikania, the perpetual challenge is how to represent in public a religion in which authority is rooted in restricted access to spirit powers, mediated by practices of secrecy and seclusion, and threatened by openness. The movements' leaders often find themselves in thorny positions as mediator between the public sphere and the practices and concerns of shrine priests.

Shrines

Afrikania's relationship to the shrine priest(esse)s and devotees has always been highly ambiguous. Even though a number of them have joined Afrikania, a major gap separates the intellectualist, Christian-derived reformation of Afrikan Traditional Religion that Afrikania brings to the attention of the public and the everyday spiritual practices and concerns of traditional religious practitioners. First, Afrikania insists on the possibility of "conversion to traditional religion" as a personal decision based on inner conviction. Most Afrikania leaders are "converted" from Christianity. This understanding of individual religious transformation is founded on a Protestant Christian heritage. In African traditional religious practice religious bonding is generated by very different models, most notably that of "initiation," which suggests a ritual transformation not only of the spirit, but also of the body. Moreover, this transformation is not initiated from within, by personal choice, but from outside, by being called by a deity, usually

through an illness or other crisis. Initiation, as a bodily process of going through affliction and healing and the fusion of human body and deity, forms the basis of a person's bond with a particular deity. This is remarkably similar to charismatic-Pentecostal conversion, which, although presented as an individual choice out of inner conviction, also implies a ritual and sensual transformation of the body into the locus of and medium of interaction with the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, Afrikania's service, performed according to the rules and conventions of a prescribed and rehearsed liturgy, conflicts with the "uncanny wildness" of spirit possession (Rosenthal, 1998:58). While Afrikania stresses the importance of coming together every Sunday to form a community and worship God in an orderly manner, in traditional religious practice communication with the spirit world requires formats that are very different from the formats of "church service." These formats are characterised by a loss of control over the body, which mediates directly in the experience of the presence of gods.

Thirdly, concerned with making ATR look nice, clean, and modern to counter dominant Christian stereotypes and "make it attractive to the people," Afrikania is very particular about beautification, hygiene, and orderliness. This implies a focus on, for instance, the white costumes of Afrikania priestesses, beautifully dressed crowds of people and traditional "pomp and pageantry" and the elimination or concealment of practices considered ugly or dirty, such as bloody animal sacrifices, frenzied spirit possession, or the fermentation of healing herbs in water. The attribution in shrines of spiritual power and therefore value to animal blood, possessed bodies, and fermented herbs among other things does not fit the "civilized" form of religion Afrikania has created. Shrine priests, even those among the membership, therefore perceive the movement as offering at most ideological leadership and organizational protection, but not spiritual leadership. The irony of Afrikania's project, however, is that while trying to attract the public to a positive image of ATR, it only hesitantly and selectively accommodates existing religious traditions and the shrine priests and priestesses whom it claims to represent.

On a more fundamental level, a tension exists between Afrikania's very project of public representation and the embodied and often secretive character of African religious traditions; that is, between Afrikania's public register of representing gods and traditional religious practitioners' more private registers of dealing with the presence of gods. Afrikania engages primarily in public discourse of talking about spirituality and has developed a strong public voice for the defence of traditional religious practices, but remains very limited in more private registers of engaging with the spiritual. Afrikania's symbolization of traditional religion through formats and representations contradicts religious traditions that are not about symbols, formats and representations, but about embodiment and experience. This division between public and private registers of relating to the spiritual remains strong and points to a difference in the role of the body and the senses in the constitution of religious subjectivity and bonding. While Afrikania's symbolic approach foregrounds the visual and the vocal, it neglects the other sensibilities, notably touch, and the experientiality of practices like initiation and spirit possession. Afrikania's representational modes of addressing "the people" thus clash with the embodied modes of religious bonding in traditional religious practice.

Discussion

Research on neo-traditional religious movements is highly important to the study of African religion. Recognizing the variety of neo-traditional religion in Africa, I have proposed to understand it as a broad spectrum of movements, rather than as two or three neatly distinguishable types. Within a spectrum that ranges from intellectualist, urban-based, political-religious initiatives to ritualist grass roots movements, the Afrikania Mission of Ghana is certainly not representative of the field as a whole, but it represents a particular strain. Its historical development, complexities, and recent tendencies, however, are indicative of the dynamics in this broader field of movements that, all in different ways, strive for the rehabilitation of what is considered indigenous African religion. Situating Afrikania in relationship to the state and national politics, Christianity and “world religions,” media and the public sphere, and indigenous shrines has brought out some major tensions in Afrikania’s project: 1) between universalization and (ethnic) particularity; 2) between modern reformation and authentication; and 3) between public representation and secrecy. Future research on other neo-traditional religious movements would gain by focusing on the contradictions involved in reviving African traditional religion in contemporary, multi-religious, and increasingly globalizing African societies and on the efforts of leaders and followers of such movements to solve such contradictions.

Three recent and overlapping tendencies in the field of neo-traditional religion can be pointed out that deserve further investigation: transnationalization, spiritualization, and commercialization.⁶ These tendencies, however, are not limited to neo-traditionalism, but are observable with other religions as well, most notably charismatic Pentecostalism, but also Islamic movements.

Throughout its more than twenty-five years of history, Afrikania has always had transnational dimensions (de Witte, 2010), but at present it shows an increasing concern with participation in a globalized world, especially through the establishment of transnational ties and the attraction of African-American groups. The historical influence of Pan-Africanism and the American Black emancipation movement on Afrikania and the African-American interest in (and visits to) the movement now receive a boost with the current boom in roots tourism. This will certainly have an impact on Afrikania’s politics of public representation. Its actual transnational network and global strategies, however, are not as developed as that of Godianism for example, that now presents itself as Global Faith Ministries of Chiism (Godianism), thus strongly echoing Pentecostal transnationalism in discourse and visual design.⁷

The tendency towards spiritualization becomes visible in Afrikania’s new service of spiritual consultation and healing, in the increasing accommodation of spirit possession, and its recent emphasis on spiritual validation of its activities. It concurs with a tendency noted by Hackett (1991) towards individualization, which marks a shift from a concern with the spiritual wellbeing of the larger community to an emphasis on individual problem solving, especially through divination and healing ritual. This trend of individualized spiritualization hangs together with a much wider emphasis on the power of spirits and ways of relating to them, and, in particular, with the upsurge of Pentecostalism.

The tendency towards commercialization of religion in contemporary African societies is manifest in the development and design of specific aspects of traditional religion as products to be sold in a religious marketplace. This trend has become particularly visible since the opening up of public spheres in many African countries alongside processes of democratization and media liberalization in the 1990s. These developments have been especially favorable to Pentecostal churches, which successfully articulate a powerful combination of commerce and religion, but have also made other religious groups, including neo-traditional ones, increasingly concerned with public representation and addressing audiences as religious consumers (De Witte, 2005b). This commercial articulation of religion, however, also has its roots in pre-Christian religious structures in which religious specialists compete for clients. Today religious commercialization becomes markedly transnational, as, for instance, shrines turn into tourist sites that offer visiting African-Americans much longed for spiritual roots.

The three tendencies of transnationalization, spiritualization, and commercialization converge in examples of traditional African religious specialists who manifest themselves (through travel and mass media) in global contexts and seek to attract new, global clienteles to their healing services. The appearance in cyberspace of the South African Zulu “shaman” Credo Mutwa described by David Chidester (2008) or the Ghanaian “fetish priest” Kwaku Bonsam (De Witte 2009; www.kwakubonsam.com) shows that premodern religious resources, structurally mobile and highly adaptable as they are, may become extra powerful and compelling when cast in global formats of commercialised spirituality in the new religious spaces opened up by the Internet and other mass media.

Notes

- 1 This distinction is not absolute: in the present, religiously plural context almost any expression of African indigenous religion incorporates at least some degree of self-representation as traditional, indigenous, or local and reference to non-traditional or foreign religions, most notably Christianity or Islam.
- 2 In his thesis, “The Changing Perspective of Wasa Amanfi Traditional Religion in Contemporary Africa” (1971), Damuah argued that “even though there is only one theology, Africans must approach it not from a colonial perspective, but Afro-centrally, that is, from an African dimension” (quoted in Gyanfosu 2002:276).
- 3 To solve the issue strategically, Ameve registered a separate religious body, named Afrikan Renaissance Mission (ARM), and claimed it to be “reorganized Afrikania.” The names Afrikania Mission and Afrikan Renaissance Mission are now used synonymously, although Afrikania Mission remains better known publicly.
- 4 See for example Schoffeleers 1985 on the Ancestor Church of Malawi; Wamue (2001) on Mungiki of Kenya, and Onyioha (1980) on Godianism.
- 5 For a discussion of the influence of African traditional religion on African Pentecostalism, see chapter 20 by Birgit Meyer, Chapter 21 by Matthews Ojo, and chapter 22 by Afe Adogame.
- 6 Compare Hackett’s (1991) “revitalization theory” which distinguishes five tendencies: universalization, modernization, commercialization, politicization, and individualization.
- 7 See www.godianism.org and note the website’s design.

CHAPTER 11

Spirit Possession in Africa¹

Susan J. Rasmussen

Introduction

What is a (possession) song? It is not a science, in which if I make a mistake I would be struck down by an Islamic scholar!

verse in a song performed by women during spirit possession rituals
in a rural Tuareg community in northern Niger

You can cure a woman of spirits, but you cannot stop her from doing the (spirit-inspired) head dance!

Tuareg Islamic scholar

Goals of this Essay

This essay critically examines spirit possession and anthropological approaches to it, with emphasis upon its occurrence in African societies and its religious significance, drawing on both secondary data from other studies and primary data from this author's field research in a case study: of possession rituals called *tende ne goumaten* in Tuareg communities of Niger. More broadly, the goal is to contribute to efforts to refine understandings of this topic. Many studies (Boddy, 1989, 1997; Stoller, 1995; Masquelier, 2001) now question older universalistic explanations of possession. The richly creative and complex social and cultural symbolism in possession cannot be reduced to a unitary meaning; these meanings constitute neither an exact mirror nor a complete inversion of society.

Spirit possession and its varied forms in Africa and beyond therefore defy reductionist explanation. Yet many valuable works on this topic in African Muslim communities, their rich insights notwithstanding, still tend to argue in terms of two opposing poles,

of resistance or accommodation, and also to situate these rituals in terms of central or peripheral religion, particularly in cases of widespread female possession (Boddy, 1989; Lewis, 1971; McIntosh, 2004, 2009). The connections between Islam, possession, and gender remain particularly problematic.

The present chapter addresses these issues in three sections. First, I briefly define spirit possession from an anthropological perspective and critically review major cross-cultural approaches, findings, and theoretical orientations in the study of this topic. Next, I examine studies of possession in Africa. In the final section, I analyze the Tuareg² case in terms of unresolved issues concerning the positioning of spirit possession in relation to more “official” organized (i.e. textual and scriptural) religion. I seek to identify finer nuances of this relationship than hegemony, resistance, center, or periphery. As many Tuareg describe them, possession illnesses are “afflictions of the heart and soul.” I ask, what is the relationship between these rituals and indigenous Tuareg religion on the one hand, and organized, “official” Islam, on the other? I search for a third alternative of interpretation to either extreme of accommodation or resistance to hegemony that offers more nuanced understandings of possession, as well as of the overlap between local and “official” religion. I argue against binary or “layercake” approaches to possession as merely opposition to, compensation for, or a substratum of, organized religion and established healing. I re-analyze and update data from my earlier longterm ethnographic research on spirit possession in Kel Ewey Tuareg communities in rural northern Niger (Rasmussen, 1995), in which I emphasized more conflictual aspects of Tuareg possession and Islam, and build on a particular aspect of Tuareg spirit possession not previously pursued in my other work on this topic (Rasmussen, 2001a, 2001b, 2009), namely: a triadic, rather than hierarchical or binary oppositional relationship between possession, local (indigenous) religion, and organized “official” (i.e., Qur’anic) Islam. Although possession reveals some conflicts, these rituals cannot be neatly situated on the “edge” of (McIntosh, 2009) or oppositional to Islam. Nor does the Tuareg case exactly correspond to an “alternate script” (Boddy, 1989). Rather, there is an interweaving of these forces in mutual reflection and knowledge construction.

In keeping with the themes of this volume, I approach spirit possession in Africa generally as religiously inspired activity. I explore how possession reveals ways in which dominant religious traditions (in the Tuareg case, local worldview, mythico-history ante-dating Islam, and local cultural interpretations of Islam) sometimes collide and conflict, but also interpenetrate and draw resources from each other.

Spirit Possession in Anthropological Perspective

Cross-Cultural Studies, Approaches, Issues

As Janice Boddy (1997:156–60) has pointed out, in its broadest meaning, spirit possession refers to “the condition of being affected by forces or entities that are normally invisible and external to humans.” In some societies, they are ancestors or mythical

culture heroes; in others, they are alien beings (Boddy, 1997:156). Often, several spirit forms are known in a single society, in a hierarchy of powers.

Spirits enter human bodies via organic and non-organic illnesses, dreams, sudden allergies or aversions, depressions, and dissociations. Hosts often resist or resent possession when it first occurs (Kendall, 1989; McIntosh, 2004, 2009; Rasmussen, 1995, 2001a, 2006; Wolf, 1992). One of two resolutions generally ensues: a spirit may be banished through exorcism, or it may be appeased and permanently accommodated. Both these outcomes have often been interpreted as conveying either resistance or accommodation in the human social domain. However, additional, more nuanced alternatives may ensue. For example, this initial period of suffering is often, though not always, transformed through a ritual process in which either the spirit is exorcised, or the host accepts the spirit's demands and enters into a therapeutic contractual relationship with the spirit, thereby becoming healthy again, and sometimes themselves practicing mediumistic or divinatory healing. Or alternatively, the host may require periodic repeated possession rituals, but become an adept, competent in guiding others through this experience. Or the host may in some cases linger in a limbo state in between these different outcomes (Rasmussen, 2001a).

In many ethnographic accounts by anthropologists, possession is interpreted by drawing on broader social science and humanities theories of hegemony and resistance: as ultimately benefiting repressed or oppressed hosts by helping them to prosper (Ben-Amos, 1994; Lewis, 1971; Parkin, 1972), to express their desires or frustrations (Lambek, 1981; Lewis, 1971; Obeyesekere, 1977), to conduct a social or political critical commentary (Rasmussen, 1995), subaltern re-interpretations of history (Stoller, 1997), or to gain a better understanding of themselves and their worlds (Boddy, 1989).

Accommodation usually requires a ritual in which the spirit is summoned by percussion music, and encouraged to enter its host's body while he or she experiences a trance of varying depth and duration, followed by total or partial amnesia. The spirit temporarily displaces its host's consciousness and is held responsible for his/her actions. For example, an ancestor is an insider who speaks and acts the community's past (Lambek, 1981); a foreign spirit exhibits behaviors that contrast markedly with those of the humans to whom it appears, harking back, for example, to colonial eras (Stoller, 1997), which can be either revered or parodied, depending upon the historical, social, and political context. A manifest spirit may demand to wear clothes or use props appropriate to its ethnic and historical identity; may speak its own language, consume or avoid certain foods and drinks (Boddy, 1989; McIntosh, 2004, 2009). Its requests can be costly, and generally should be provided by host's kin. The initial rite of possession may establish the need for repeated observances, such as ritual restriction or "taboos" (Masquelier, 2001). The spirit should permit its host to recover, in return for which the latter often becomes a regular conduit—medium—for the spirit, enabling it to manifest with ease at future possession ceremonies. Or more subtle and ambiguous communication may take place: the imagery of songs in some rituals may allude to powerful mythico-historical healing practices that have become submerged and obscured, though not forbidden, in everyday memory and ritual practices of the "official" religion (Rasmussen, 2001b). Thus spirit possession in some manner is about control, but the meanings and implications of this control are neither transparent nor uniform across different settings.

Possession is also a “reservoir of collective understandings, an imaginative system or thought, and a means of tracing human connection, as well as a therapeutic practice and a religious and philosophical tenet” (Boddy, 1997:157). In addition, I would add that possession constitutes a system of empathy, a walking on a “tightrope of power,” often vacillating ambivalently between outright resistance and outright accommodation. It entails careful weighing of alternative paths in a cosmos where the boundaries between the person and the physical, social, and superhuman worlds are permeable and negotiable. It consists of a body of knowledge and indigenous way of knowing, the epistemic premises of which differ from those of positive science and western psychology, which tend to reify humans as discrete beings and locate agency within the self (Boddy, 1997:157). Thus more recently, many anthropological studies of possession have become aware of the limitations of our own philosophical concepts as analytical lenses for understanding possession.

Since approximately the mid-1970s, scholars began to take seriously both the fact that spirits are a given in lives of their hosts and the idea that spirits are also creative, imaginative phenomena, producing a shift in analytical approaches in the scholarly literature. Attempts to reduce possession to a universal explanation involving the simple expression of illness, psychological distress, or relative deprivation gave way to increased attention to local practice, cultural logics, and human creativity.

In the last twenty-five years in particular, some of most insightful accounts of possession have been those which treat it as a “coherent symbolic system” situated in a wider context of meaning (Lambek, 1981:5,60) and a creative, polysemic practice (Masquelier, 2001:124–5). Brown’s ethnography of possession in Voodoo communities in Haiti and New York City documents the multiple roles that Voodoo spirits can play as they mirror the full range of possibilities inherent in the particular episode of life over which they preside (Brown, 1991:6). Lambek suggests that spirit possession may be variously construed as a system of social communication (Lambek, 1981) and as a form of knowledge, a knowing how, and a “knowing as” (Lambek, 1993:338). Others have emphasized the capacity of possession to generate “shifting, contested, and at times contradictory meanings” (Boddy, 1989:8; Masquelier, 2001:124–5; Rasmussen, 1995; Rosenthal, 1998). Tuareg spirit possession, for example, has at least three levels of meaning: therapeutic, ludic, and aesthetic. Most possessed persons are defined as afflicted with an illness “of the heart and soul,” requiring non-Qur’anic healing of the *tende-n-goumaten* exorcism ritual. On another level, much joking and satirical social commentary occur during this ritual, both on the part of the audience, and within the songs performed by the female chorus. This ritual is also considered to be art by many local residents, who hold precise esthetic criteria of excellence for an effective cure: songs and ritual props must be very beautiful, and distract the possessed from her problems.

Reductionism and strict functionalism therefore no longer dominate analyses of possession, and many scholars recognize its plural potential. Yet despite the diversity of approaches, much recent literature on possession remains dominated by a particular theoretical perspective, I.M. Lewis’s (1971) early reading of possession as a response to oppression, which merged with more recent symbolic interpretations. Consequently, there persists a tendency to treat possession as meaning-laden counter-hegemonic commentary primarily in response to power (McIntosh, 2009). For example, Comaroff (1985), Lan (1985), Ong (1988), and Stoller (1995) have treated possession as a means

of articulating and energizing opposition to western incursions, capitalism, and other oppressive forces. Thus despite more nuanced treatments, many works still argue that possession cults constitute some form of resistance (Aman and Boddy, 1994:419), although importantly, some local residents may deny this.

One prevalent anthropological observation is that in Islamic societies, spirit possession and knowledge of holy (Qur'anic) scriptures reflect two distinct, gendered domains of religious and medico-ritual concepts and practices. In officially Islamic African societies, for example, women tend to traffic with spirits, and men usually have greater access to a "Universal" (i.e. organized, Qur'anic, often state-sponsored) Islam based on holy scriptures (Aman and Boddy, 1994; Lambek, 1993; Lewis, 1986). Although men do not deny the existence of spirits, in contexts of Islamism they are likely to regard women who appease spirits as un-Islamic: proper Muslims appeal directly to Allah (Masquelier, 2001). Correspondingly, women's participation in spirit cults can on some levels be counterhegemonic to mainstream Islam. The appeasement rituals of *zar* spirits, for example, offer a parodical commentary on local gender relations in northern Sudan (Boddy, 1989), and the displays of immodesty at *bori* spirit ceremony invert the usual Islamic norms of feminine decorum in Hausa communities of southern Niger (Masquelier, 2001). Although men may be victims of spirit possession, in the Sudan and in northern Niger, most men refrain from joining these predominantly female public ceremonies for fear of ridicule (Boddy, 1989; Rasmussen, 1995).

Yet this aspect of spirit possession may constitute only one level of meaning. For example, in Tuareg society, most women enjoy high social prestige and independent property ownership, and also participate in "official" Islam, and Islamic scholars/marabouts refer many female patients to the *tende-n-goumaten* exorcism ritual. Yet women tend to be intimidated by Islamic scholars/marabouts, and undoubtedly this is what is alluded to in possession song verses opposing them to the "science" of Islam and marabouts' authority, and what is implied by marabouts when they state that some women's spirits do not respond to the healing of Qur'anic verses (Rasmussen, 1995). On the other hand, throughout many societies in Africa, spirit possession often fuses different medico-ritual healing systems (Rasmussen, 2001a, 2006). There is the need for greater rapprochement between religion and medico-ritual studies of possession.

Spirit Possession in Africa

Possession and Religion

Throughout Africa, the boundaries between religion and medicine are hazy; many rituals focus on relieving illness, disrupted fertility, or other personal distress attributed to invasive spirits. Although possession is often defined as an affliction, most local language terminologies distinguish it from insanity.

In his early, classic analytical model, Lewis (1971, 1986) divided possession phenomena into two categories, "central" and "peripheral" cults. In the former, possession is a principal religious activity; it is a positive experience involving spirits who uphold the moral order (for example, ancestors or culture heroes) and speak through an official

“priesthood” typically comprised of men. In the latter, possession plays no moral role because the spirits themselves are amoral; this type of possession can strike anyone, but usually afflicts women and others of presumed “marginal” or “subordinate” status, and represents their unconscious bid for attention and redress.

Subsequent studies have questioned the utility of Lewis’s earlier distinction. Viewed from the perspective of those who become possessed, possession of either sort is a moral activity whereby humans negotiate with beings more powerful than they and distinguish themselves as members of a moral community from other entities and societies (Boddy, 1997:158). Lewis himself has modified his earlier position, later arguing instead that possession in Muslim societies serves as a “foil” to Islam.

Fritz W. Kramer (1987, tr. 1993) separates “charismatic cults”—wherein socially legitimated mediums of ancestors or culture heroes claim inspirational authority over a diverse population and are devoted to fostering its cohesion—from “acephalous” ones where possession strikes more randomly; where spirits are multiple, foreign, and morally ambiguous; where the society is relatively homogeneous; and where adherents differentiate selves from others, socially and personally, through their possession experiences. Although women predominate in acephalous cults and men in charismatic ones, Kramer recognizes that his categories are not clear-cut and that both types have moral implications.

Possession practices in Africa share common themes, but also vary significantly with local knowledge systems and social contexts. In much of eastern Africa and the Sahel, for example, Arabic or Arabic-derived terms for spirits are prevalent: *jinn* or *jinni*, *shaytan* or *shaytani*, *djinoun*, *rih*, and *rowhani* (Boddy, 1997:159). The significance of religion is striking here. The incidence of such terms coincides with the expansion of Islam, and it is debatable whether Islam sparked, or assimilated and homogenized local spirit practices. Some localized terms and forms of possession have spread with the people who practiced them. *Zar*, which is thought to have begun in Ethiopia, moved into Somalia (where it is also known as *sar*) and has influenced rituals along the Swahili coast; it also spread west and north along the Nile, most likely with those whom the Ottomans enslaved (Boddy, 1997:159).

Spirit possession in Africa, as elsewhere, is an epistemological form, with numerous functions and meanings—therapeutic, religious, aesthetic, ludic, pedagogical, political. Still, many ethnographic works suggest that in some contexts, possession does indeed embody opposition, ranging from indirect critique of the status quo to outright parody of dominant groups. The question, then, is how to reconcile this current turn against so-called “master narratives” with assumptions about resistance which seem to underpin so much of this work on possession (McIntosh, 2004:92).

As McIntosh astutely points out, to critique is not merely to represent, but to articulate something critical about a representation (McIntosh, 2004:105, 2009). As Stoller insightfully observes among the Songhai, overtly parodic elements of *Hauka* possession do not simply mirror colonial behavior; they reframe it in such a way as to reconfigure it as target of mockery (Stoller, 1995). Similarly, according to Boddy, *zar* also provides exaggerated and peculiar representations of society; through their very distortion, these representations suggest a meta-commentary on their content (Boddy, 1989). In *Hauka* and *zar* cases, furthermore, possession occurs in a demonstrative, ritualistic

setting which engenders new thought and reflection, as through story-telling or theatrical performance. Similarly, in Tuareg *tende-n-goumaten* possession rituals, the satirical song verses enable the expression of multiple voices and viewpoints on issues of concern through mocking, yet often oblique and subtle social commentaries. There is usually a carnivalesque, rather than strictly serious atmosphere among audience participants, many of whom flirt and initiate courtships with persons normally forbidden to marry in that endogamous, stratified rural community (Rasmussen, 1995).

According to McIntosh, Giriama in and around the Kenyan town of Malindi are poor and marginal, and have long been pressured to convert to Islam by Swahili and Arab patrons, employers, and prospective kin-by-marriage. These pressures take superhuman as well as social forms: a large number of Giriama women and men say they are tormented by possessing Muslim spirits who hold their bodies hostage until they agree to capitulate to spirit's demands to convert to Islam (McIntosh, 2004:93). Many of those who convert as a result of forcible possession by spirits are diviners, and while they may gain considerable cachet from doing their work with "high-class" Muslim spirits, they do not usually enjoy economic advantages as a result, unlike Parkin's (1972:41) Islamized entrepreneurs (McIntosh, 2004:103). Rather, they tend not to be very different in lifestyle from other Giriama. Nor is spirit-forced possession male-dominated; in fact, in Malindi women make up the majority of such converts, in part because women are considered more vulnerable to spirit possession (McIntosh, 2004). For those who do this, they are able to say that one has not become a willing accomplice of the perceived oppressor. But many under duress from Muslim spirits express reluctance to distance themselves from other Giriama (McIntosh, 2004:103). Thus there appears little obvious advantage to their condition. Yet in this author's analytical framework, the Giriama in Malindi remain situated on the "edge" of Islam (McIntosh, 2009).

There is still the need to move beyond mutually exclusive instrumental and interpretive and center and periphery models. Also, there remains the challenge of how to incorporate symbolism and power into analysis of possession without imposing the researcher's own concepts onto these processes. Although some aspects of possession may express meaning-laden forms of resistance or oppositional meta-commentaries, other aspects may express ambivalence and ambiguity—mutually reflective dialogues—in relation to organized established religion.

Within this framework, I now explore the connections between the Tuareg *tende-n-goumaten* and religion, specifically Islam and indigenous local religion antedating Islam, which, I show, are sometimes opposed, but also sometimes interwoven. Why, for example, does a Tuareg woman suffering from spirits of the wild or solitude causing illnesses of the heart and soul see an Islamic scholar both before and following the possession exorcism ritual?

Beyond Hegemony and Resistance: Spirits among the Tuareg

Historical and Ethnographic Background

Most Tuareg, sometimes called Kel Tamajaq, after their language, in the Berber (Amazigh) group, reside in Saharan and Sahelian regions of Niger, Mali, Algeria, Libya,

and Burkina Faso. Many now combine livestock herding with oasis gardening, caravan and other itinerant trading, artisanry, and labor migration. Pre-colonial society was organized into inherited occupational strata based upon descent and practicing client-patron rights and obligations. Formerly, client and servile peoples performed labor and paid tithes to aristocratic Tuareg, and tributary groups raided and traded for the latter (Bernus, 1981; Keenan, 1977; Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen, 1997). Islamic scholars, popularly called “marabouts” in Niger and Mali, interpret the Qur’an, and in the countryside, still adjudicate legal cases and perform psycho-social counseling.

Tuareg converted to Islam between the eighth and eleventh centuries C.E. (Norris, 1975, 1990). In local philosophy, cosmology, rituals, and mythico-histories, there are interwoven influences of pre-Islamic and Qur’anic and state religious and legal institutions: patrilineal property inheritance and ownership are superimposed on some persisting matrilineal forms, and medico-rituals draw from both influences (Claudot-Hawad, 1993; Rasmussen, 1995, 2006). There is relatively free social interaction between the sexes. Many women independently own property, may initiate divorce, travel alone, and socialize with unrelated men. There are, however, some variations in Tuareg gender constructs between the different regions and between nomadic, sedentarized, rural, and urban communities (Bernus, 1981; Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen, 1997). There are also social changes from French colonial and post-colonial state policies, droughts, unemployment, and sporadic Tuareg armed rebellions against the central governments of Niger and Mali. The spirit possession ritual is very ancient, however, and pre-dates all these upheavals.

The Tende–n–Goumaten Spirit Possession Exorcism Ritual

In Tamajaq, the predominantly female, musical, and public spirit possession rituals are called *tende-n-goumaten*, which denotes “*tende* of the *goumaten*.” *Tende* refers to a drum constructed from a mortar ordinarily used to crush grain, with a goatskin stretched over its top, and struck with the hands. It is also a generic term describing this musical exorcism ritual as well as other musical events featuring this drum, which women, smith/artisans, or former slaves usually play. During the *tende-n-goumaten*, there is trance possession in which the possessed initially lies prone beneath a blanket but later rises and performs (usually seated) a dance called the head dance. Most local residents explain that the purpose of the music is to “distract” the host/adept/trancee from problems. Although some trances occur spontaneously among different ritual participants, usually the person for whom the ritual is held has been suffering from a condition called *tamazai*, denoting approximately a depression causing spirits to enter the soul. Close friends, relatives, and neighbors organize this ritual for the possessed person—usually a woman. Other participants include a chorus of young women with a soloist; a player of the *tende*; and a player of the *asakalabo*, a calabash floating upside-down in a bucket of water, struck with a long stick.

Goumaten is the plural form of *gouma*, the latter denoting the possessed person, usually (though not always) a woman. *Goumaten* also is used, in the Air dialect of Tamajaq (Tayrt) by many in the Kel Ewey confederation near Mt. Bagzan in the Air Mountains, to refer to spirits in general who possess the person in trance at these rituals.

Two other terms—Kel Essuf and *eljenan*—are also occasionally used interchangeably with *goumaten* (Rasmussen, 1995). Strictly speaking, however, there are differences between these terms. Although spirits among the Tuareg tend to be less personalized than those in the elaborate pantheons of some other African groups, many Tuareg ritual specialists and healers distinguish between the *Kel Essuf*—(People of the Wild or Solitude, spirits in local cosmology and mythology pre-dating Islam)—and *eljenan* (from the Arabic, *djinoun* or *djinn* spirits mentioned in the Qu’ran). For a cure, Kel Essuf and *goumaten* require a *tende-n-goumaten* possession ritual; *eljenan* require Qur’anic verses (Rasmussen, 1995, 2001a, 2001b), and most women’s spirits do not respond to the Qur’anic verse cure.

Later in my research, I discovered hints of additional spirits in possession symbolism that most local residents tend not to mention directly. Most of these latter spirits, not all individually named, derive from ancient matrilineal mythico-histories, for example, tree spirits obliquely referred to in herbal medicine, and female founding ancestresses, whose names are seldom pronounced aloud from respect toward them, and also sometimes, from reticence before Islamic scholars and men (Rasmussen, 2001b, 2006).

The *tende-n-goumaten* coexists alongside several other types of spirit possession and mediumship involving medico-ritual healing. The *tende-n-goumaten* ritual, recall, acts to exorcize a condition, *tamazai*, defined by most residents as “an affliction of the heart and soul” in a public ritual featuring trance possession, music and song, and group therapy. Another spirit-related healing method involves more private treatments undergone with Islamic scholars (*inesmelen*, popularly called marabouts) who heal *eljenan*, those spirits mentioned in the Qur’an, with Qur’anic verses. Finally, there is spirit possession that involves mediumship or divination in a longterm contract with the Kel Essuf, in which the medium/diviner must obey the tutelary spirit, offer it regular sacrifices and gifts, and observe certain ritual restrictions. These latter two types of spirit-related healing involve more private psycho-social counseling, whereas the *tende-n-goumaten* possession exorcism ritual is always held in public, features music and song, and includes a mixed-sex audience, usually of young (i.e. adolescent and recently-married) people.

Therefore on first scrutiny, women who undergo the *tende-n-oumaten* by implication, appear to suffer from the *tamazai* of *goumaten* or Kel Essuf spirits, not *eljenan* (Rasmussen, 1995). Yet on closer scrutiny, I have found greater complexity in these relationships. Each type of spirit possession is distinct in many respects, and some Tuareg do oppose Islamic and non-Islamic medico-rituals and specialists, mythico-histories, and knowledge. Yet there are contradictions complicating the relationship between female spirit possession and Islam. On the one hand, some local residents make a hierarchical contrast between the *tende n goumaten* and Islam with its Qur’anic healing and knowledge. One frequently possessed smith/artisan woman ruefully lamented to me that “women become possessed because, unlike men, women since their childhood are not protected by maraboutism” (Rasmussen, 1995:85). She complained that her parents had not protected her adequately with amulets, but that they had done so with her brothers. Another adept felt that “women become possessed because they study the Qur’an less” (Rasmussen, 1995:85).

However, only male residents assume that women are consciously manipulating during this ritual. In this respect, not local women’s, but rather local men’s theories

resemble some anthropological theories who contend that “female deprivation” is the main cause of possession. For example, some young men claimed that women hold a ritual “because they want a husband” (Rasmussen, 1995:86). Some elderly men insisted that women do this “because they want to get out of work” (Rasmussen 1995), though other men and women denied this explanation. Many patients’ husbands asserted that “women want songs and pretty clothes featured at the ritual.” Marabouts assert that women’s possession spirits attack “little people,” while the spirits of the illnesses of God attack “great people” (Rasmussen, 1995:88). Men and Islamic scholars insist that women’s possession songs are “not science,” while men’s *ezzeke* songs praising God are derived from Sufism, and are thus identified with the “science of the Qur’an (*taneslema*)” (Rasmussen, 1995:89). Islamic scholars explain that spirits are equally dangerous to both men and women, but that men’s spirits and women’s spirits require different types of cures.

At first glance, there is official disapproval from Islamic scholars of these rites’ verse content and audience ambiance: there are marabouts’ injunctions against praying without precautionary ablutions after attending these rituals, and some song verses oppose Qur’anic as textual study to the *tende-n-goumaten* songs as “word of the mouth” (Rasmussen, 1995:146). Yet Islamic scholars often refer possessed persons to the possession ritual cure. Thus although marabouts are not present at this ritual, they indirectly participate and even encourage it tacitly by diagnosing for *goumaten* or Kel Essuf spirits, and referring patients to this ritual when their spirits seem incurable by Qur’anic verses (i.e., are not *eljenan* spirits mentioned in Qur’an), and require beautiful music, songs, and jokes. They also consult with patients in seclusion between the latters’ possession ceremonies. Furthermore, some possession songs address the Islamic God (Allah or more rarely Mesri, the Tamajaq term), as well as tree spirits and secular concerns such as love (Rasmussen, 2001b).

Moreover, I noticed that in practice, these medico-rituals overlap, and often, a variety of specialists from each category treat the same person, either simultaneously or sequentially (Rasmussen, 1995, 2001a, 2006). Sometimes, furthermore, patients move between different treatments, or linger upon one ritual more than others. For example, some persons initially suffer from spirit affliction, but eventually become diviner/mediums; whereas others never move beyond the *tende-n-goumaten* exorcism ritual process, which is repeated at intervals for them throughout life, and its illness of the heart and soul is passed down to female descendants through the mother’s milk. Such persons become longterm adepts, not always viewed in negative terms, but rather, positively, as an asserting family heritage. These women also consider themselves practicing Muslims. Also, although women of diverse social backgrounds undergo the *tende-n-goumaten* ritual, many belong to prominent maraboutique families.

Hence the special need, in studying possession, for longterm research and longitudinal case studies from the same community, and for study of plural healing systems there. This approach counterbalances the recently fashionable calls for “global” and “multi-sited field research” in anthropology.

Several examples from case studies and life histories, described in greater detail and analyzed in a different framework elsewhere (Rasmussen, 2001a, 2006) and updated here, vividly illustrate these points. One case concerned a woman I call Fatima, who

suffered from a difficult pregnancy (Rasmussen, 2006:36–43). Her family had suffered many drought losses, and some men had been compelled to spend years away on more prolonged than usual caravans and migrant labor. Their mother had experienced a sharp decline in health. Even before these crises, however, many women in this family had been active longterm in the local spirit possession rituals as both singers and possessed persons.

During one rainy season, Fatima, in advanced pregnancy but overdue, fell ill. Her first resort was to try traditional herbal medicines. Older women in Fatima's family and a few herbal medicine women, came to administer them, infusions of a red color described to me as "mothers' medicines, (*amagal n anna*).¹" This medicine acted together with medico-ritual (the spirit possession exorcism ritual) and other more bodily-focused healing practices (such as massage) to create a holistic healing force that infused the medicines' and the patient's identities. Shortly after these treatments, Fatima gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

Nonetheless, despite the successful birth and the ensuing protective seclusion with Islamic amulets for mother and child, Fatima remained unwell. She finally traveled to the hospital in the town of Agadez, where she received six penicillin injections. Her fever appeared to be cured. Soon, she returned to her rural village. However, she remained depressed, and did not emerge from her tent. Friends and neighbors worried that her head was now "in the wild or solitude (*essuf*).²" The young mother began to also suffer from *tamazai*, an "illness of the heart and soul," suffered by not solely those who have just given birth, but also in other stressful situations, believed to sometimes lead to spirit possession.

Fatima's relatives arranged a spirit possession exorcism ritual for her. The spirit possession songs were considered by audience to be very beautiful and well-performed. Many songs referred metaphorically to tree-branches swaying in the wind, the name of one of the drum patterns associated with possession, which symbolizes resilience and strength (Rasmussen, 1995, 2001a). Fatima responded to the songs by rising from her initial prone position beneath a blanket and performing a head dance, called *asul*: this involves moving the head and shoulders, and sometimes the entire upper body from the waist, from side to side, more and more vigorously until the possessed collapses upon the ground. This latter motion is interpreted by local residents as becoming free of the afflicting spirits. There was much applause and encouragement from the audience.

The next morning, Fatima indicated that she felt better, although her relatives, friends, and the healers explained, "She is not yet cured of her condition; her head remains in the wild." But over longterm, these alternative treatments—herbal medicines and ritual group therapy of the possession ritual, combined with the hospital and ritual group therapy of the possession exorcism, appeared effective, for ultimately Fatima regained her health and well-being.

Her older sister later explained to me that, "Fatima's spirits were also caused by inheritance (*gado*, from a Hausa term) from our mother." Note here that her mother had recently become ill, and later that year, sadly, died. In retrospect, I now realize that perhaps her possession involved, on another level of significance, a pre-inheritance of matrilineal spirits and worry over her mother's deteriorating condition, as well as her

loneliness from separation from her husband, who remained away on travel and failed to return home on time for the child's nameday, a vitally important rite of passage, in which the father, Islamic scholar, and maternal grandmother all confer names on the child. Many Tuareg also blame love—in particular, unrequited love or love suppressed from being expressed (*tarama*) for causing many psycho-social and organic problems. The point here is that there are multiple negotiations of meanings of spirit possession here, and a variety of healing methods undertaken.

Many illnesses, notwithstanding their very real physical symptoms, are believed to strike at transitions, when jealous spirits and humans compete for and threaten the individual. This is why a new mother and her baby are sheltered, and given special protective medicines by herbal medicine women and/or female relatives, as well as Qur'anic amulets made by marabouts and smiths.

Thus in many treatments, marabouts' amulets are necessary but insufficient; they must be supplemented by additional healing methods, such as herbalism and spirit possession exorcism rituals, to which herbal medicine women, Islamic marabout scholars, and specialized diviners refer the patient. Thus spirit possession rituals are not forbidden by "official" Islam, although some marabouts disapprove of them, and marabouts also tend to side with men in disputes and divorce (Rasmussen, 1995, 2006). Thus different healers collaborated and contributed to different phases of diagnoses, treatments, and referrals in Fatima's illness. Fatima's illness event set in motion different agents to intervene. Tuareg spirit possession cannot be oversimplified as either compensation for deprivation, exclusion from official religion (Islam), or gender inequity. Although of course this case is not representative of all cases, it does suggest not only that possession does not always compensate women for deprivation, but also that this ritual does not always oppose, or even constitute an alternate script, to other medico-rituals and knowledge systems; rather, it can in some contexts work in conjunction with them, to provide comfort and support.

Another case detailed elsewhere (Rasmussen, 2001a:71–7), now re-analyzed and updated here, concerns a woman I call Assalo. She was the mother of several children who were taken away from her by her ex-husband, greatly distressing her. Assalo was described by some local residents as "permanently insane" (*tanebzeg*) in addition to being temporarily "bothered" by depression (*tamazai*) and her Kel Essuf spirits, for example, rumored to have run unclothed through the desert. Although Assalo was of aristocratic origins and her mother was a skilled herbalist, they nonetheless became marginalized because Assalo had several illegitimate children after her divorce. Divorce itself is not a stigma among Tuareg, but one must not bear children out of wedlock.

Perhaps in response to this continuing ambiguous identity and status, perhaps partly from previous stress as well, Assalo was intermittently possessed by Kel Essuf spirits requiring the musical exorcism ritual. "These spirits," she explained to me, "were caused by my head problems." She consulted these rites after other healers failed to cure her. Herbal medicine women diagnosed her problems as coming from these spirits "dancing in her stomach," and referred her to marabouts/Islamic scholars, who divined by measuring her head, and in turn referred her, as a patient unresponsive to Qur'anic verses, to the spirit possession exorcism ritual. Assalo underwent several of these rituals, but remained deeply troubled.

Eventually, she and her mother moved away to a larger oasis about twenty miles away. Tragically, Assalo in local viewpoint later became permanently even more “completely crazy” (*tanebzeg*). By 2002, following her mother’s death, I learned that she was confined in an uncle’s compound, tied up in a small tent, where she was rumored to have once snatched up and consumed, alive, an entire kid-goat who ventured near her. In effect, it was this chilling detail, not spirit possession, that became the horrific symbol of Asalo’s marginal status: for by then, she had become dispossessed of not only her social attachments and wellbeing, but also her property: those livestock herds and the nuptial tent, so important to Tuareg women’s independence.

In Tuareg spirit-related afflictions, some individuals may be abandoned, falling between the cracks of the system (Rasmussen, 2001a). Others may be cured, albeit without guarantee of banishing illness forever. In only rare cases, may the afflicted gain a positive pact with the Kel Essuf, and become re-defined as a healer: that spirit medium/diviner whose powers depend upon a controlled, legitimate pact with the spirit and trust and respect from the human community. Assalo eventually ceased being a longterm host or adept in the *tende-n-goumaten*, where the musical cure with its supportive drummer and singers and audience often offered valuable group therapy. Nor did this lost soul ever become a medium or diviner. Rather, she became defined as insane—a status outside the idiom of possession altogether. Neither non-Qur’anic nor Qur’anic spirit cures “worked” for her. Sadly, Assalo never “returned” from that metaphorical wild space (*essuf*) that she entered during the ritual, whose songs aim to bring the possessed back into the social and moral community, not necessarily to compensate for their “deprivation.”

Significantly, Assalo’s stomach problems, though their cures in other contexts empower women in their medico-ritual symbolism, as in herbalism, for example, (Rasmussen, 2006), here coincided with her violation of sexual taboos. In effect, this subverted not solely Islamic/Qur’anic, but also prevalent Tuareg cultural values of matriliney, female dignity, and controlled fertility, important in bilineal knowledge transmission, healing credentials, prestige, and property. Thus her spirit problems led to a “dead end,” rather than to empowerment as a diviner. She had wandered too far away from the moral community; rather than presiding over her own tent, she became imprisoned in someone else’s.

Concluding Analysis and Implications

Spirit possession can therefore enable and produce social consequences without always being consciously instrumental, or symbolically diametrically opposed to hegemonic structures. Useful here is a distinction between because vs. in order to motives in possession (Kapferer, 1983; Rasmussen, 1995). One can become possessed not “in order to” do something else, but also (or rather) “because” one is expected to become possessed under certain circumstances. Indeed, many persons possessed are not viewed as deviant; in the Tuareg cases, Fatima, but not Asalo, was viewed as typical in responding to a predicament in ways that conform to gendered and other socially constructed typifications within her society. Among the Tuareg, women are expected to suffer from

“illnesses of the heart and soul” whose spirits of the wild or solitude require “jokes and music” for a cure. Both Fatima and Asalo suffered from these illnesses, but their respective social positions and fates were very different.

The causes and outcomes of spirit possession therefore vary, and the personhood of hosts and adepts is very permeable and flexible. Tuareg and other peoples’ spirit possessions reveal possession as religiously inspired practice, as a way of coping with human destiny that is neither exclusively resistance nor exclusively accommodation. Spirit possession rituals, Islam, and “traditional” (indigenous) African religions emerge as not always neatly opposed as polar opposites, “center” or “periphery”, or on the “edge” of organized scriptural/textual religion; rather, their relationships shift according to context.

Notes

- 1 Some data in the Tuareg case study section of this essay are based on my 1982–83 field residence and research project focusing upon spirit possession, in the rural Air Mountains of Niger, which I re-analyze and update here. Other data derive from my later, more longterm and longitudinal, research in the same community between 1991 and 2002, as well as in the Air town of Agadez. More recently (2002 and 2006), I have conducted research in Tuareg communities in and around Kidal, Mali. In all these projects, I am grateful for support from Fulbright Hays, Wenner-Gren Foundation, National Geographic, Social Science Research Council, Indiana University, and University of Houston.
- 2 The different Tuareg groups vary in the extent to which older matrilineal legal and symbolic elements persist, and in the degree of influence of Islamic scholars. Among the Kel Ewey Tuareg in rural northern Niger, clans of Islamic scholars are very respected and influential, and Qur’anic inheritance is slightly more prevalent than among some other Tuareg groups. On the other hand, matrilineal elements persist in *akh ihuderen* property endowments (herds, date palms) that are passed to daughters and nieces, in herbal and divining healing, and in mythico-histories. There have been several armed conflicts between Tuareg and central governments of Niger and Mali. For background details, see Decalo (1997) and Claudot-Hawad (1993). At the center of these conflicts have been tensions over the historical marginalization of more nomadic Tuareg, whose leaders have demanded greater representation in higher education, jobs, and positions in central governments. Uranium mining by transnational corporations in northern Niger has also become the focus of tension.

CHAPTER 12

Christian Missions in Africa

Norman Etherington

Christianity flourished in Africa long before it took hold in Europe. It is said to have been planted in Egypt by Mark the Evangelist and survived the rise of Islam across North Africa. Egypt was especially important in the development of early monasticism. In Augustine of Hippo Africa produced one of Christianity's most powerful theologians. Thus, the idea that Christianity is in some way essentially a western import spread through the efforts of modern European missionaries is quite mistaken. However, the mission experience did profoundly shape the character of modern African Christianity. Any assessment of the impact of missions must begin by posing the question, how would African Christianity be different had there been no missions? This essay aims to analyze the influence of Christian missions by suggesting some answers to that question.

The launch of missions south of the Sahara was associated with the advent of the Portuguese on the West African coast. Hopes of outflanking Islam by making contact with African Christians had been part of the incentive for the very expensive voyages of exploration undertaken by the Portuguese after 1415. The project of expelling Islam from the Iberian Peninsula had been a crucial factor in the making of the Portuguese nation. Crusading zeal continued to drive them on even after that objective had been attained. When Diogo Cão reached the mouth of the Congo River in 1482, he hoped it would provide a watery highway to African Christians with whom an anti-Muslim alliance might be forged. Although this did not eventuate, the lower Congo soon emerged as the primary focus of Portuguese evangelization in Africa. Within a few years the local ruler, the Manicongo, announced his conversion to the new faith and members of the royal family were sent to Europe for further education.

After this promising start the Congo mission declined into confusion and corruption, poisoned by the onset of the slave trade when the sugar-growing potential of offshore islands was discovered. As Portuguese sovereignty expanded to nearby Angola Christianity made considerable headway, aided by the Portuguese policy of treating the

Catholic religion as a state enterprise. The great disadvantage of this policy was hierarchical control from the top, which operated to stifle African initiatives in religion, installed the Inquisition and made Portuguese priests the arbiters of all matters of faith. When an African woman calling herself Dona Beatrice was burned at the stake in 1706 for her role in spreading the "Antonian heresy," the damaging consequences of state-sponsored clerical control became tragically clear. Although Christianity survived in Portuguese Angola and Mozambique, it did not emerge as a significant evangelizing force until the revival of Portuguese imperial ambitions at the end of the nineteenth century.

Much more significant were the Protestant missions to sub-Saharan Africa that commenced in the eighteenth century with little or no state sponsorship. As Andrew Walls observes, the launch of London Missionary Society missions to the Pacific in the 1790s marked the first occasion in modern British history when ministers of religion went to work in alien societies on terms set by other people.¹ Shortly thereafter their missions were extended to kingdoms located beyond the frontier of Britain's Cape Colony in South Africa. In West Africa Protestant missions also attempted to work beyond the frontiers of the small colonial enclaves established by Europeans to service their slave trading operations. Although West African missions suffered horrendous losses through the deaths of agents who fell victim to endemic fevers, they were largely driven by a motive unprecedented in the previous history of Christian evangelism to right a wrong perpetrated on faraway people by their own compatriots: the Atlantic slave trade. Their approach might have been naïve but in view of its dangers, their sincerity can hardly be doubted. The initial plan emphasized converting Africans to Christianity in order to expose the sinfulness of dealing in slaves. The missionaries assumed that African supplies would then dry up, forcing traders to leave or take up the business of "legitimate commerce". Later, when the missionary death toll showed the futility of employing more than a bare minimum of European agents, several missions turned to the use of local agents who had acquired childhood immunity to the most common fevers. One result was that an African bishop, Samuel Crowther, with a force of African assistants, led the first Church Missionary Society mission on the Niger River.

Taking up the human rights issue of slavery set a precedent for mission involvement in many subsequent human rights' campaigns, which were unlikely to have occurred without the mission presence. Similar association with human rights issues evolved in early nineteenth-century South Africa. Beginning with Johannes Van der Kemp and John Phillip of the London Missionary Society, missionaries challenged the Cape Colony's legal system, which operated to deprive indigenous people of land, liberty, and wage justice. For most of the next two centuries missions were associated with human rights campaigns in South Africa and subject to frequent attack from government officials and white settler politicians. Though only a small minority of foreign missionaries proved willing to stick their necks out on these issues, without mission Christianity events would have taken a different course. African Christians also shone in twentieth century human rights campaigns in South Africa, taking a leading role in founding the African National Congress. The involvement of Catholic Archbishop Hurley and Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu in campaigns against *apartheid* towards the end of the twentieth century carried on the tradition established in the early days of the London Mission Society's operations.

Mission Christianity provided conduits for the expression of African grievances that would not otherwise have existed. Foreign missionaries could mobilize the resources of their home churches on behalf of African causes in ways that purely indigenous churches could not have done. They could write letters to newspapers, organize pressure groups, lead protest delegations, and persuade sympathetic politicians to lend support. These lent crucial support to campaigns such as that mounted at the turn of the twentieth century against the abuses perpetrated by concessionary rubber companies in the Congo Free State. The work of non-government organizations (NGOs) in many parts of Africa today continues international linkages forged by earlier Christian missions.

Paradoxically, the activity with which mission Christianity is most closely associated, the conversion of individuals, owes relatively little to the foreign missionary presence. Very few missionaries witnessed mass conversions brought about by their own preaching. The annals of mission societies are replete with accounts of foreign missionaries struggling on year after year without achieving any conversions. David Livingstone is but one such notable example. In almost every instance notable movements of conversion were launched and carried through by Africans who had experienced their own change of heart and were determined to spread the word. Of course many key figures had been initially won over by the preaching of a foreign missionary, but they owed their success to their ability to translate that message into words their fellow Africans understood. Much of that work of translation and conversion went on far from mission churches, carried on by unpaid enthusiastic preachers, and will probably never be properly documented. But the overwhelming testimony from all sources is that African Christianity spread through the agency of African Christians. The special contribution of mission Christianity was not the accomplishment of conversion but the methods they devised to assist the development of indigenous churches and preaching networks.

Two nineteenth-century mission theorists were especially influential in promoting African initiatives: Henry Venn of the Church Missionary Society in England and Rufus Anderson, long-time Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Venn and Anderson, who corresponded frequently over a period of years, arrived at the same conclusion: the work of conversion could not be accomplished by European and North American agency alone. There would never be enough missionaries, never enough money to do the job. Their prescription for success was to plant churches devoted to "the three selves"—churches that were self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. That is to say, Venn and Anderson aimed at mobilizing African societies as a missionary force. This was a considerable departure from previous expressions of African Christianity. Whatever evangelistic force the Coptic or Ethiopian churches had possessed in earlier ages had long since dissipated. The early-modern Catholic Church in Portuguese colonies failed to develop an internal strategy for mission. As articulated by Venn and Anderson, the objective of the three selves proved to be more powerful and enduring than the means allocated to achieving it. In practice foreign missionaries often baulked at according African congregations the freedom required to be self-governing, jealously guarding their own authority and not infrequently expressing doubts about African capacities that reflected prevailing doctrines of racial difference. African congregations often found themselves short of the

cash required to support their own ministers, let alone to launch missions to faraway places. And African ministers often preferred the regular income they received from missions to the less reliable succor they could raise from their own people. Yet the ideal lived on, spurring the training of an indigenous ministry.

The evangelistic methods employed by the missions gave a semblance of system to the work of conversion. Although these methods varied from denomination to denomination, most involved the use of unordained lay preachers, teachers, and catechists. It is no surprise that Methodist missions excelled in the range and effectiveness of the famous methods that gave their denomination its name. Church members were enrolled in classes and were expected to record their attendance at services through the tickets issued to them. Missionaries rotated priestly duties at the different stations of their circuit; at other times lay preachers took the services, supervised Sunday schools and handed out tickets to members. These activities accustomed Africans to teaching and preaching, while preparing some of them for eventual ordination. Behind the small body of paid foreign missionaries stood a veritable army of unpaid or barely paid local assistants.

Before the advent of "faith missions" late in the nineteenth century, there was general agreement among mission societies that ministers must be trained, even though ideas differed as to the degree of training required. Catholics insisted on the methods prescribed by the authority of the Pope and various religious orders. Church of England, American Congregational as well as American Baptist missionaries expected their ministers to have university degrees. The London Missionary Society and British Methodists accepted candidates with lower educational qualifications, relying on practical experience in preaching to produce effective ministers. What they all agreed on was that ministers must be literate; otherwise they could not be relied on to interpret Scripture. Christianity would certainly have spread through Africa by oral means when conditions were ripe. However, without mission Christianity, evangelization would not have been assisted by a numerous literate African clergy. It is probable that mission Christianity is also responsible for promoting the idea of a paid, professional clergy, in contrast to the less formal organization of religious authority in African Islam.

Mission training in literacy extended beyond ministers in Protestant churches, for whom Bible reading by individuals was a universal ideal. Schooling was thus at the heart of the mission enterprise. The first task of the mainstream Protestant missionary in a new situation was to set up a school. This often consisted of meetings in the missionary's house, where the wife doubled as a schoolmistress. Because adults had other responsibilities, it was usually easiest to recruit children to mission schools; besides, the missionaries anticipated that young pliable minds would be more easily influenced in favor of Christianity. The nineteenth-century explosion of missions coincided with an educational revolution in Europe and North America, marked by the spread of formal, publicly supported education for both girls and boys on an unprecedented scale. Missionaries who had received their own schooling in those circumstances naturally aspired to accomplish something like a comparable educational revolution in their fields. For the most part they found willing partners in African parents who recognized the advantage of adapting to the new world of colonial capitalism that was gradually engulfing the continent. When missionary families proved unable to meet the

constantly expanding demand, missions began recruiting large numbers of single women—so much so that females came to outnumber men in most mission operations.²

The language of instruction emerged as a hot topic of controversy in missions. From the point of view of spreading the gospel it made sense to teach people to be literate in their own languages. This entailed prodigious effort on the part of foreign missionaries who had first to learn the local language before they could produce vernacular bibles and secular educational texts. Where languages had not previously been reduced to writing, the work also involved the production of grammars and systems of spelling. Printing presses were required to run off cheap texts. The work was lengthy, laborious, and expensive. Without the missionary presence many African languages would still exist only in spoken, not written forms. Missionary linguistic work also generated some significant unintended consequences. By writing down languages previously spread orally, the missionaries effectively functioned as language makers. For example, in the South African interior where people had spoken a single language marked by small differences in dialect, two competing teams of missionaries went to work on producing grammars. A French-speaking group working in the kingdom of Lesotho used French principles of spelling. An English-speaking group not faraway applied English principles. The result was the generation of two languages, Sotho and Tswana, where there had been one spoken language before. Similar phenomena could be observed in many parts of Africa. To complicate matters, many Africans saw the practical advantages of learning to read and write the languages used by European colonial powers and asked that their children be instructed in those languages.

During the colonial era most formal education in Africa was provided by mission schools, sometimes assisted by government grants. As a result meetings of the first cohort of post-independence leaders in business, politics, and the professions could feel like college reunions. Among the graduates of elite educational institutions associated with missions were Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Julius Nyerere, Robert Mugabe, and Nelson Mandela. Missions also opened pathways to study abroad for those seeking higher qualifications. Tiyo Soga, the first African ordained as a minister by the Presbyterian church in South Africa, attended teachers' college in Glasgow. John L. Dube, founding president of South Africa's African National Congress, attended Oberlin College in Ohio. Another ANC President, Pixley Seme, was assisted by missionaries on the educational highway that led him first to Columbia University and afterwards to Oxford. Such examples could be almost endlessly multiplied. Their importance in the colonial era cannot be overstated. African intellectuals found the mission network of overseas contacts invaluable in the face of an officialdom aiming to confine them within a closed system where the only appeal was to its own authority. They were able to measure their accomplishments against extra-colonial scales of achievement, rub shoulders with elite students from other African countries, and experience a degree of racial equality seldom encountered at home. They also acquired a wider understanding of the world system in which they were embedded and some of the tools required to challenge their place in it. Education was the greatest legacy of foreign missions in Africa.

While it cannot be certainly known, it seems likely that mission Christianity brought denominationalism and a tendency toward multiplying religious schism to Africa. This

was partly a matter of timing. At the very moment that advances in medical knowledge and the advent of ostensibly Christian-friendly colonial regimes made tropical regions more accessible to outsiders, European and North American missionary societies seized on sub-Saharan Africa as the greatest opportunity for evangelizing peoples not under the thrall of competing world religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, or Confucianism. Agents from a bewildering array of denominations streamed in, just as they had earlier streamed into the healthier climate of South Africa. Africans soon came to understand that they could choose their own denominational identities. Those thrown out by one church could join another one. Under such circumstances missionary control of congregations was difficult if not impossible to achieve. A second factor promoting denominational fragmentation was the Venn-Anderson goal of self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating churches. Once local congregations were granted the authority to choose their own ministers and govern their own affairs, the way was opened for further denominational fragmentation. The development of the American Zulu Mission in South Africa provides a good example of the process. Prodded by Rufus Anderson, the mission began ordaining African ministers in the 1870s. By the 1890s the Zulu Congregational Church had been organized as a freestanding African organization, though still in close connection with the American missionaries. Throughout the subsequent decade the missionaries struggled to assert control over individual ministers and congregations who chose to go their own way. Some rejoined the main body but others remained independent—in effect new denominations. It has sometimes been suggested that the tendency toward denomination fragmentation is a peculiar characteristic of African Christianity rather than a product of missions. However, the fact that the more hierarchical churches—Lutherans, Catholics, and Anglicans—suffered many fewer schisms suggests that it was the mission model that generated division.

Fragmentation accelerated after the turn of the twentieth century, spurred on by the advent of faith missions, which operated without the institutional apparatus characteristic of earlier missions. Methodology rather than theology was their distinguishing feature. Seizing on the biblical passage that declared that Christ would not return until the gospel had been preached to all the earth, they set about doing just that. Coverage mattered more to them than conversions or congregations. Faith missions typically lacked fixed headquarters, relying instead on itinerant preaching to win souls. Realizing that they would spread the message faster with African assistance, they valued piety and eloquence in the catechists they recruited above college degrees. Both British and American mission operations of this type proliferated after 1900, many of them sustained by the enthusiasm and meagre contributions of very small communities. They tended to assume that all Africa lay open to them, but colonial authorities of all kinds took a dim view of their operations, suspecting them of preaching subversion. In South Africa governments panicked over the so-called Ethiopian menace, blaming it for the outbreak of a rebellion in Natal in 1906. Their worry was that black preachers working on their own were spreading the message of Africa for the Africans. That slogan had certainly been employed, though not as a call to arms; rather to spur Africans on to take the lead in converting their fellow countrymen. In this sense the Ethiopian movement was just another version of the Venn-Anderson programme of self-government, self-support, and self-propagation. In the eyes of officialdom self-government preached

by uncredentialed or self-appointed Africans posed a threat to white rule. The government of Natal made the most concerted effort to stamp out independent African evangelism. Spies and secret police were assigned to report on their meetings. Laws were passed prohibiting any non-white preacher from occupying a station or preaching place without direct supervision by a white missionary. Itinerant black preachers were turned back at border crossings and American black missionaries—thought to be especially dangerous—were denied entry. Nothing, however, could stop the torrent of independent preaching, either in Natal or in other European colonies. West Africa and the Congo River Basin produced their own independent religious leaders, who, when challenged by colonial authority, acquired the prestige of martyrdom. The Prophet Wadé Harris managed to be imprisoned in Ivory Coast, the Gold Coast, and Liberia, while Simon Kimbangu died in a Congo gaol.

Theologians and anthropologists of the early twentieth century attempted to differentiate the newly emerging independent African churches from orthodox Christianity and missionary evangelism, seeing them as “syncretic” compounds of African and European religious thought. Now the dominant tendency is to view the whole spectrum of Christ-centered religion as manifestations of a variegated African Christianity. Most historians would agree, finding it difficult if not impossible to distinguish the proliferation of North American and European Christian sects from those that sprang up in Africa. With the benefit of hindsight it makes more sense to see the early decades of the twentieth century as a time when the dynamism of African-driven Christian mission began to outpace the evangelistic efforts of missions founded by foreigners. This was not a simple function of race or culture. The faith missions typically involved close working partnerships between foreign missionaries and indigenous preachers. Conventional Protestant and Catholic theologians would regard a great many of them as outrageously unorthodox. Take, for example, the missionary career of Joseph Booth (1851–1932). A British-born Baptist, Booth discovered his vocation for mission in Australia. Rejected because of his age by the China Inland Mission, a faith mission, Booth established his first independent mission in the British colony of Nyasaland in 1892, claiming a nominal affiliation with the Baptist church. He subsequently aligned himself with Seventh Day Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists (who excommunicated him), and Jehovah’s Witnesses. One of his earliest converts, John Chilembwe, went on to study at a black Baptist seminary in America, but proved his personal fidelity by following every tortuous swerve in Booth’s religious development. As Jehovah’s Witnesses they placed absolute faith in founder Charles Taze Russell’s prediction that the biblically prophesied wars of Armageddon would occur soon after 1912: a prediction they regarded as fulfilled by the outbreak of world war in 1914. Chilembwe conceived that his role in the End Times was to raise a rebellion against a colonial regime whose oppression seemed an authentic expression of the “Whore of Babylon” denounced in the Book of Revelations. Though he died in battle and Joseph Booth was arrested at his new missionary post in British Basutoland before being expelled from South Africa, their work lived on in the Kitiwala (Watchtower) movement that spread by African agency up through the copper belt of Northern Rhodesia and into the Congo. In later years American Jehovah’s Witnesses unsuccessfully attempted to reclaim leadership of the movement, but they did attract many new adherents.

Which part of this complex story belongs solely to the history of mission Christianity, which part to the history of resistance to colonial rule, and which part to the history of African religious independency? Surely it is impossible to disentangle the strands which are so inextricably bound up in the history of Christian evangelism in Africa.

It used to be widely and influentially argued that foreign missions functioned as an auxiliary force of European imperialism. The frequently strained relations between missionaries—whether foreign or African—and the colonial state in South Africa, Nyasaland, Congo, and West Africa suggest that Christianity moved along an independent trajectory. The advent of European empires in Africa certainly improved the personal security of individual missionaries and grants in aid to mission schools were generally welcomed, even though they came with strings attached. Rarely, however, did the colonial state intervene to encourage conversions to Christianity. Apart from Spanish and Portuguese colonies, which did favour Catholic mission, the European powers acquiesced in religious pluralism. The anti-clericalism of the French Third Republic (1870–1940) acted as a counterbalance to any bias toward Catholic mission, even though the nation was overwhelmingly Catholic. When missions threatened to upset relations with their Muslim subjects, both France and Britain took a ruthlessly pragmatic stance. Frederick Lugard as Governor of Nigeria banned Christian missionaries from operating in the Muslim North. A similar policy was applied in the northern Sudan under the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium.

The most convincing proof that missions could live without the colonial state came at independence. Many nationalists had predicted that Christianity would decline, especially where Islam was strong. Empires tumbled but Christian missions lived on, more and more of them headed by African priests and bishops. While reliable statistics are hard to come by, it appears that Christianity spread more rapidly after independence than before. Islam has made few inroads beyond its old strongholds in north and east Africa. Some reckon that Africa is today the most Christian of all the continents. In the immediate aftermath of decolonization, during the 1970s, some African churchmen spearheaded a movement calling for a Moratorium on Mission, which they conceived as a kind of declaration of religious independence paralleling political independence. The movement made little headway, probably due to the already spectacular diversity and fragmentation of African Christian churches. Nowhere did newly independent regimes adopt anti-clerical policies or bar the entrance of foreign missionaries. And only a few professedly Christian sects complained of state persecution, most notably the Jehovah's Witnesses in Malawi, whose religiously grounded opposition to paying taxes and serving in military forces provoked understandable suspicion. Although the relative proportion of foreign-born to indigenous missionaries has undoubtedly declined since independence, foreign missionaries remain a numerous body. Today they are more likely to come from the United States than from Britain or continental Europe, and to proselytize on behalf of "born again" or Pentecostal churches. Through new media, especially television, African Christians have become familiar with American techniques of tele-evangelism and turn out in huge numbers when well-known revivalists and faith healers visit their countries. Some critics see this as evidence of a new American religious imperialism in league with rightwing politics. However, it may more plausibly be interpreted as the latest manifestation of a longstanding tendency

for African Christianity to merge indigenous modes of evangelism with foreign imports. In a final irony, Africa today has become a significant exporter of missionaries in its own right. Agents of African churches can be found engaged in evangelical and pastoral work right around the globe.

Quite apart from changes in belief, religious organization, the promotion of literacy, and evangelical methods, Christian missions have made some notable contributions to African cultural development. Not least of these is the built form of religious buildings. African churches, even those of the most radical and independent cast of mind, generally resemble a nineteenth-century European Christian's idea of what a church should look like: rectangular in form with a pitched roof, an elevated cross mounted on some kind of steeple, with a visible bell to summon folk to services. Another contribution of Mission Christianity is clerical garb, where once again European models predominate: long robes, collars, chasubles, and crosiers are seen everywhere. Revivalists and even many street-corner preachers appear in suits and ties. Nowhere has there been a widespread and successful move to adopt more "authentically African" costumes. The main African contributions to religious dress have been the denominational costumes in which ordinary parishioners appear on Sundays and other holy days throughout much of contemporary Christian Africa. Appearing to take literally the injunction to clad themselves in the raiment of the Lord, they have no obvious counterparts in Europe or North America.

Mission Christianity has also made a powerful cultural impact on African music. Though it was not dictated by either theology or the evangelical enterprise, foreign missionaries introduced tonal four-part choral singing and a host of previously unknown musical instruments: the piano, harmonium, pipe and electric organs, Salvation Army band instruments, and in more recent times, drum kits and electric guitars. African Christians took to the new musical forms with gusto. Revival meetings of the 1870s exposed African Christians to the performance of popular hymns by the prolific Moody and Sankey. In 1889 Gospel Singers from Virginia scored a huge success with audiences in Durban. Before many more years passed, South African Jubilee Singers were touring America. This was not simply a matter of Africans adopting European forms imported by missionaries; it was a two-way street. New music developed through complex international cultural transactions. Seeing African-Americans acclaimed for their singing of "Spirituals" inspired Africans politically as well as musically. The emergence of jazz and ragtime across the Atlantic inspired Africans who had learned tonal harmonies through hymn-singing to experiment with new instruments and rhythms. "Township jazz" emerged first in areas heavily influenced by Christianity and often included arrangements of old hymns. Nineteenth-century missionaries had collaborated with their converts to produce African language versions of their hymns. In the mid-twentieth century missionaries striving for a more complete acculturation of their religion encouraged the writing of liturgical music that would extend the opportunities for the expression of indigenous forms and ideas. The most notable achievement of this movement was the *Missa Luba*, a partly improvised version of the Catholic mass that arose from collaboration between the priest Guido Haazen, and a choir of boys and teachers from Central School at Kadima in what was then the Belgian Congo. Again religious music demonstrated its power to move across borders; soon after its first

recording, songs from the *Missa Luba* shot to the top of the popular music charts in Britain. The spread of radio, television, CDs, and the internet have promoted further convergence. American gospel singing has acquired a huge following among African Christians.

Thus it happened that modern Christian missions, which originated as an alien religious enterprise, developed over time into a primarily African enterprise, marked by a range of complex and continuing interactions with Christians on other continents. Mission remains a potent force in African religious, social and political life.

Notes

- 1 Andrew Walls, "The Eighteenth-century Protestant Missionary Awakening," in Brian Stanley (ed.), *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 27–8.
- 2 See Jeffrey Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise since 1700* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008).

CHAPTER 13

Christianity in Africa

David T. Ngong

Although African Christianity has only recently begun to make considerable mark on the continent and around the world, Christianity's story on the continent is as old as that of the beginnings of the faith itself. From its influential beginnings in Egypt and Roman North Africa to its spreading around the world in our own time, Christianity has always been an important part of the religious landscape of the continent. The *World Christian Database* reports that of the over 1 billion people in Africa in 2010, over 490 million of them were Christians and the rest were indigenous religionists (about 108 million), Muslims (about 423 million), Hindus (about 3 million), Buddhists (about 250,000), Jews (about 133,000), agnostics (about 6 million), and atheists (about 600,000). In 2010, 212 million Christians lived in Eastern Africa, 105 million in Middle Africa, 16.5 million in Northern Africa, 47.5 million in Southern Africa, and 109 million in Western Africa. The number of Christians in Africa is further divided into major groups or denominations such as Anglicans (60 million), Catholics (170 million), Independents (103 million), Orthodox (45 million), Protestants (140 million), and the so-called "Marginals" (3.6 million).¹ The recent exponential growth of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity on the continent is hardly lost sight of in the literature.² It is believed that by 2025, there will be over 600 million Christians in the continent.³ From this data, one may surmise that Christianity will, for good or ill, continue to have an increasingly important role to play in the socio-economic and political life of the continent. However, it is hoped that adherents of the faith will learn from the many mistakes made in the past so that Christianity can make a positive contribution to the lives of Africans in the future.

This broad overview of Christianity in Africa will be held together by a single crucial theme: that seeking the overall wellbeing of the people of the continent is what has contributed, and will continue to contribute, to the wellbeing of the faith on the continent. In other words, Christianity maintains a tenacious presence in the continent because, by and large, many people seem to think that it enhances their vision of the

good life. Considering the many challenges that exist in many African societies, much of contemporary African Christianity stresses wellbeing or abundant life (John 10:10), understood largely in material terms. Material wellbeing will be stressed in this chapter but it should be remembered that holistic wellbeing is both material and spiritual (immaterial and transtemporal). Thus, the challenge for the Christian faith in Africa, as it completes the first decade of the twenty-first century, is to promote the overall wellbeing of people.

In the first section of this chapter, it is argued that early Christians in Egypt and Roman North Africa perceived the Christian faith as a force that promoted their overall wellbeing, and Christianity declined when it ceased to be a force for good in society.⁴ The second section will discuss what can be termed “Constantinian Christianity” in Africa, a form of Christianity that grew in African kingdoms like Ethiopia, Nubia, and Kongo. There was a common belief among missionaries that if the King or Emperor was converted, the whole kingdom would follow the King’s example and become Christians, a strategy used by African leaders to consolidate power in their kingdoms.⁵ The third section shall deal with modern Christianity in Africa including the colonial and the postcolonial periods. Since some Africans thought that colonial Christianity diminished their overall wellbeing, during the postcolonial period, the dominant agenda was the Africanization of Christianity, establishing churches and theologies that took the African cultural, socio-economic, and political situations seriously.

Early African Christianity and the Quest for Wholeness

Scholars have argued that a comprehensive overview of African Christianity must take into account early Christianity in North Africa.⁶ Early accounts of Christianity indicate that some of the disciples like Thomas preached in Egypt and by the second half of the second century, Christianity flourished in Alexandria, which, in addition to Rome and Antioch, was one of the three major ecclesiastical sees in the ancient world.⁷ With the aid of the largest library in the ancient world, Alexandria became a center of learning that drew scholars from far and wide, thus producing not only Gnosticism but also great theologians such as Clement, Origen, and Athanasius who contributed significantly to the formation of the Christian tradition in general and with the salutary effects of the Christian faith. The cosmopolitan areas of North Africa like Alexandria produced scholars who wrote scholarly works in Greek (like African theologians do today when they write in English, French, Portuguese, Afrikaans, or Arabic), but in other areas of North Africa, a distinctive Christianity, which was to play a considerable role in evangelizing Egypt and shaping the practice of spiritual discipline through a life of separation from the world, emerged in the monastic traditions.⁸ Spurred on by an understanding of Christianity as spiritual warfare, as many African Christians do today, this form of Christianity thrived on simplicity, orality, and the drive to bring human desire under control. Coptic Christianity, which emerged from this mixture of indigenous and non-indigenous cultures, survives today in Egypt and the African diaspora. Although Christianity in the Maghreb has not survived, early Christianity in that part of Africa contributed significantly to the development of the Christian tradition through the

writings of theologians like Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine as well as the martyrs who were willing to die for their faith.

Several North African theologians established key theological motifs that remain in use today. Clement of Alexandria (c.150–c.215 C.E.), an Athenian whose theology developed in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Alexandria, wrote treatises on poverty and wealth; issues that are still remain important to the African Church. In his work “Who is the Rich Man that Shall be Saved?” he applied the allegorical method of interpretation made famous by the Alexandrian school to New Testament texts that record the encounter between Jesus and the rich young man. Upon asking Jesus what he (the rich young man) needed to do in order to be saved, Jesus told him to keep the commandments. When the young man replied that he had kept all the commandments, Jesus asked him to sell his possessions and follow Jesus. The reaction of the man made Jesus say: “It will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven . . . it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Mt. 19:23–24, NRSV). According to Clement, when Jesus asked the young man to sell his property, Jesus did not mean it literally. In fact, Jesus could not mean it literally, because “it is no great thing or desirable to be destitute of wealth.”⁹ One could not feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, as Jesus himself demands, if one is poor. Wealth is therefore desirable insofar as it is used to serve the needs of the neighbor. Wealth is desirable if it is seen as a gift of God meant for human wellbeing. The rich person who will not be saved is the person “who carries his [*sic*] riches in his soul, and instead of God’s Spirit bears in his heart gold or land, and is always acquiring possessions without end, and is perpetually on the outlook for more . . .”¹⁰ To change from the person who worships wealth instead of God to the person who sees wealth as a gift of God to be used for the wellbeing of others, Clement avers, requires a change of disposition, from a pathological position of ill-health to wellness. Clement portrays the avaricious person as a person suffering from “soul diseases” or the disorder of the passions or desires.¹¹ Clement argues that Jesus was asking the rich young ruler to exchange his rapacious desires that make him value wealth more than anything else for the peace of God that will make him to see wealth as a thing to be used for the benefit of others and to the glory of God. Considering that Clement was addressing himself to the rich of Alexandria who struggled with the demands of their Christian faith relative to the wealth they had, his work has lessons for Africans today in light of the way many politicians have impoverished their states.

Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200–258), mostly remembered as one who emphasized the unity of the church and from whom the problematic claim that “there is no salvation outside the church” has come down to us, should probably be remembered in contemporary Africa as the patron saint of health and could be seen today as a patron saint of those who fight against HIV and AIDS. Cyprian’s episcopacy was marked not only by persecution of and division in the church, but also by a deadly disease which his biographer, Pontius, describes thus:

a dreadful plague, and excessive destruction of a hateful disease invaded every house in succession of the trembling populace, carrying off day by day with abrupt attack number-

less people, everyone from his own house. All were shuddering, fleeing, shunning the contagion, impiously exposing their own friends, as if with the exclusion of the person who was sure to die of the plague, one could exclude death itself also.¹²

Death was everywhere and the situation was desperate. In the circumstances, people became selfish, showing concern only for those who were related to them. But Cyprian urged Christians to take care of all because God cares for both the Christian and the non-Christian.¹³ Reading about the nature of the diseases that plagued North Africa in the time of Cyprian, one can not help but be reminded of the present HIV and AIDS situation in Africa today. In the fight against the disease, African Christians could draw inspiration from those Christian teaching from the past.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296–356) champion of Nicene orthodoxy is also important for African Christianity. He was important because he contributed to the decision that sealed the New Testament books.¹⁴ He is well known for challenging the views held by some theologians that Jesus was less than God. Athanasius argued that the Son was of the same nature as God the Father. Athanasius developed his view that the Son and the Holy Spirit were divine from his understanding of salvation. For him, human beings could only flourish sustained by God who, in the Son (Christ), assumed their humanity so that humans may be divinized.¹⁵ It is this same stress on the divinity of the Son that St. Cyril of Alexandria (c. 376–444) maintained, when he insisted, against Nestorius, that Mary was the Mother of God (*Theotokos*) and not merely the Mother of Christ (*Christotokos*). When at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 it would be decided that Christ should be understood as having two equal natures, human and divine, Egyptian Christians disagreed with this apparent lack of stress on their belief that after the incarnation Christ should be understood as divine. This, of course, did not mean that they did not acknowledge the humanity of Christ, but only that, like many African Christians today, they stressed his divinity. This rejection of Chalcedon would lead to the birth of the Coptic Orthodox Church, described by an African theologian as “the prototype for all African initiated churches.”¹⁶ But even before the severing of ties with the imperial church, rural Africans had already started severing ties with a church which they saw as being on the side of power. This is how de Gruchy interprets the monastic movement in early Christian Egypt that was championed by people such as St. Antony (c. 251–356) and Pachomius (c. 290–346). De Gruchy argues that “the monastic journey into the desert corresponded with an earlier movement (‘Anchoritism’) of Coptic speaking peasants, many already Christian, who fled into the desert to escape Roman persecution and oppression, refusing to assume the burden of slave labour. Anthony’s retreat into the wilderness was in part an act of solidarity with the poor.”¹⁷

Two centuries after Clement, however, one of the most influential African theologians, St. Augustine of Hippo (354–530) would develop themes addressed by other Africans and expand on them in commentaries and works that include *Confessiones*, *De Trinitate*, and the *Civitate Dei*. These works have significantly shaped western understanding of the Christian faith. Some African scholars have criticized Augustine because he denied materiality and invited Roman authorities to suppress the Donatists, a religious movement in North Africa that struggled for doctrinal purity and social issues.

Those who criticize Augustine's social teachings ignore the fact that he wrote on these social issues also.

Augustine like Clement argued that humans should not be intoxicated by materiality but instead should develop a healthy attachment to material things; an unhealthy attachment could destroy the common good. Humans should order their love properly by loving God more than something else and give all other things their proper place in relation to God. This would prevent one from loving wealth and forgetting that it should be used for the good of all.¹⁸ Those who fail to develop right loving relationships could bring injury to themselves, others, and hinder the experience of the common good. Such people should not be leaders in the state because they cannot rule justly and are like robbers who hold a group of people hostage in order to loot their wealth.¹⁹ Augustine's ethics of properly ordered love is one that is still to be appropriated in African political theology.

Constantinian Christianity in Africa

Historians trace the beginnings of the Church in places like Nubia (present-day Sudan) and Axum (Ethiopia) to activities that took place around royal courts. In the case of Ethiopia, two Syrian Christians, Frumentius and Adesius, who were shipwrecked, were rescued and brought to the palace of the Ethiopian King at Axum. During their stay, they educated the king's children and also introduced Christianity to the king and the kingdom.²⁰ It is also noted in the story of Julian, the Egyptian Copt married to Emperor Justinian, who, through the palace intrigues of Theodora, brought Christianity to a Nubian court in the sixth century.²¹

In the fifteenth century, Portuguese explorers and traders tried to plant Christianity in the palaces of Kongo, Benin, and Warri, with the hopes that if the kings were converted, the people would follow the royal example. Missionaries employed this strategy from the fourth century up until the early twentieth century. Considering that for African kings, as was the case in Europe before the Enlightenment, religion and politics were not separate, Christianity was, for the most part, appropriated in ways that promoted the power of the incumbents rather than the well being of the people.²² This is especially the case in Ethiopia, where King Ezana declared Christianity the official religion. Later on, Ethiopia's foundational myth, the *Kebre Negast* (also spelt *Nagast or Negest*) or "Book of the Glory of the Kings," traced the origins of Ethiopian royal line to the Old Testament, especially from king Solomon. Thus, the king of Ethiopia took titles like the "Conquering Lion of Judah, Elect of God, Descendant of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon."²³ In the thirteenth century, King Zara Ya'iqob, tried to Christianize the entire kingdom and called for the extermination of Jews and "pagans." Recognized as the national religion, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church received privileges from the state at the expense of the people.²⁴ This would be partly responsible for the overthrowing of Emperor Haile Selasie (Ras Tafari) in 1974 and the establishment of a Marxist regime that was also overthrown in 1991.

While imperial patronage encouraged the building of churches, monuments, and the development of art and liturgy that enriched the identity of Ethiopia and inspired

other African Christian communities, and the Ethiopian Church became firmly established as a state church, the top leaders were not always in touch with the ordinary people who drew their spiritual and social strength from the charisma of monks and monastic communities. These ordinary people appropriated the power of Christian faith for healing. Ethiopian Christianity is replete with stories of healing holy water and the exorcising of demonic spirits by monks.²⁵

When the Portuguese first planted the Christian faith in royal courts in West Africa, kings appropriated the faith for political purposes. This was the case with the fifteenth-century Senegalese king known as Jeleen or Behemoui. As a Muslim, he refused to be converted to Christianity, but when his kingdom was threatened he turned to Portugal and converted to Christianity in the presence of the King of Portugal, Dom João. However, in the Kingdoms of Benin and Warri, royal patronage of Christianity did not last because the people saw no use for it. Royal patronage for Christianity succeeded in the Kongo for a while because it was appropriated by ordinary people as a force for self-assertion evidenced in the actions of Kimpa Vita (Donna Beatrice) who established a local order named after Saint Anthony of North Africa.²⁶ The appropriation of Christianity to serve the purposes of the powerful has been a staple of the faith in Africa. As we proceed into the twenty-first century, the question that needs to be pursued is whether the powerful will continue to use Christianity for their own purposes or to promote the well-being of the people.²⁷

Colonial and Postcolonial African Christianity and the Quest for Wholeness

Modern Christianity and its social services in Africa are associated by scholars with colonial domination and racist projects that diminished African peoples and cultures. It is for that reason that early African Church leaders and theologians largely reacted against the Christian project that was tainted from the beginning by political and economic ambitions. In the postcolonial era, political elite who proclaimed that there were Christians continued to treat their own citizens with unspeakable contempt. The neglect of the people and decline in social services created a vacuum that has been filled by the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Thus, contemporary African Christianity spends much time in emergency mode, attempting to quench one fire after the other in order to promote the wellbeing of the people.

The situation of neglect could be traced to the later part of the nineteenth century when some African church leaders drew inspiration from the biblical and political memory of Ethiopia and formed African Initiated Churches (AIC).²⁸ Appropriating the biblical text and lore that Ethiopia would stretch out her hand to God (Psalm 68:31) and the political triumph demonstrated by Ethiopia's stiff rejection of colonial rule, these churches would insist that African Christians could have a direct relationship with God without the mediation of western missionaries. Some described these churches as proto-nationalist movements in Africa because they were among the early instances of resistance against colonial rule on the continent. Ogbu Kalu describes the emergence of Ethiopian churches as the first wave of the development of African initiative

in Christianity. The second was the development of the prophet-healing churches, and the third is the current explosion of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity on the continent.²⁹ Beginning in the early twentieth century, churches led by Africans began to emerge that were not simply resistance to foreign missionary activity but also a demonstration of the movement of the Holy Spirit in the African context. Sometimes known as prophetic or Zionist churches, they emerged not only as reactions to the oppressive colonial contexts but also in the context of an international epidemic such as the 1918 influenza outbreak that took the life of many. Because these churches appealed to the power of the Spirit of God for healing and exorcism, they have been described by Allan Anderson as Pentecostal-like churches.³⁰

The rise of these AIC contributed to the development of a Christian witness and practice that would take African idioms seriously. Thus, a demand for the inculturation of Christianity in the continent emerged. Discourses that called for the inculturation of Christianity in the continent sought to give the Christian faith an African color not only in terms of liturgical accoutrements but also in terms of taking seriously the African spiritualized cosmology.³¹ This cry to inculturate, indigenize, or Africanize Christianity has not so much been about the desire to articulate African identity;³² it has also been about the desire to make Christianity fit into the African understanding of religion as crucial to human quest for wholeness. Although social ministries of the Christian churches made life better for Africans, many Africans still felt Christianity was impotent to address their spiritualized cosmology and a quest for what Belgian missionary Placide Tempels and his followers called vital force or vital union.³³ Western missionary Christianity, by embracing Enlightenment rationality, could not effectively address this African vitalistic cosmology in which the spiritual and physical realms “live in interdependence for their mutual advantage.”³⁴ Insisting that Christianity simply embrace this African cosmology, however, has its shortcomings,³⁵ but supporters of African beliefs argue that Christianity could gain important ideas from the African world if it will promote the wellbeing of Africans.

One of the shortcomings of the insistence on inculturation is that it made Christians oblivious of the oppressive political situations in which Africans lived under postcolonial political overlords. This situation was however ameliorated by the active critique of misrule in African countries by some priests, bishops, and pastors; the development of what has been described as African liberation theology; and, even more significantly, the role of Black and liberation theology in South Africa in the ending of apartheid. Although the church did not significantly criticize the murderous secular political elite during the two decades following the independence of most African countries, such daring churchmen as Archbishop Janani Luwum of Uganda did, and he was assassinated in 1977 by Idi Amin. During the period which Terrence Ranger has described as the “second democratic revolution” (the struggle for independence from colonial rule being the first), Christian churches became more vocal in criticizing the one-party and military states.³⁶ Although the role of churches in the political arena in this period, like in any other period, is mixed, it cannot be denied that churches contributed significantly in ushering in multi-party democracy in many African countries.³⁷ This political engagement followed the critical spirit taken by liberation theologians like Engelbert Mveng and Jean-Marc Éla of Cameroon who criticized the dictatorial

regime of Paul Biya. In 1995, Mveng was found strangled to death in mysterious circumstances and supporters urged Éla to flee to Canada where he recently passed away.³⁸ Éla was one of those who argued that the liberation of the African people can only be effectively accomplished if there were a *mélange* between the inculturation and liberation perspectives.³⁹ In apartheid South Africa, many church leaders such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak, Manas Buthelezi, borrowed from the Black Theology developed in the United States to critique the heretical, racist regime in that country. Liberation theologians like Beyers Naude, John de Gruchy, Charles Villa Vencio, James Cochrane, Gerald West, Barney Pitso, Denis Akermann, Intumeleng Mosala, and many others engaged in a critical theological project which provided articulations that kept South African Churches on track in the fight against apartheid. These reflections and praxis culminated in the *Kairos Document* (1985), which marked a turning point in the naming and condemnation of state theology as an evil.

In the socio-cultural sphere, African women theologians have challenged the patriarchal systems characteristic of many African societies. Their work done through The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, has rejected all forms of oppression perpetuated in the name of all religions.⁴⁰ They have been most vocal especially with issues of women's health and the serious dangers posed by HIV and AIDS that is decimating the African population, especially African women. One of the leading women in this regard is Musa Dube of Botswana who has designed and participated in numerous seminars in many African countries, aimed at sensitizing ministers and their flock on how to include HIV and AIDS in their teaching of Christianity.⁴¹ This pandemic continues to be one of the most formidable challenges that African Christianity has to face because its alleviation is essential to improving the overall wellbeing of the people.

Looking Forward: Instead of a Conclusion

This chapter has argued that in spite of some shortcomings, improving the overall wellbeing of people has been central to Christianity in Africa, beginning from the earliest establishment of the religion in Egypt to the present. Although this overall wellbeing is not limited to material wellbeing, there are some important material conditions that need to be addressed if Christianity is to contribute in transforming Africa in the twenty-first century. However, this material transformation cannot happen unless certain spiritual dispositions, especially those articulated in the earliest expressions of the faith in the continent, are cultivated.

Terrence Ranger describes the pressing issues that African Christianity has to address today as "crisis," which include: the crisis of violence, the crisis of poverty, and the crisis of morality.⁴² In his influential book on economic development, *The Bottom Billion*, the economist Paul Collier points out that the billion people who are the dregs of the world today, retrogressing instead of developing (seventy percent of whom are in Africa), are caught in traps such as conflict and bad governance in small countries.⁴³ This resonates with ideas articulated by Ranger. Thus, the issues of violence, poverty, and corruption are not separate as they may first appear. Too often violence is caused by greed engendered by the accumulation of the limited resources by those in positions of power. This

violence in turn leads to destruction of already limited resources and the escalation of poverty, perpetrating the cycle. Violent conflicts in Africa are falling but current cases such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Sudan are hard to miss. Where violent conflicts do not presently exist, conditions that make for such conflicts are not hard to come by. Countries where the ruling elite do not treat their people with contempt are in the minority. The cancer of corruption is eating at the hearts of many societies, including even South Africa, where the government recently installed a hotline for the reporting of corruption. On top of all this, the scourge of HIV and AIDS persists.

In the twenty-first century the question the churches will have to answer is why a continent where the Christian tradition is growing faster than any region in the world wallows in such ignominy.⁴⁴ Does the Christian faith provide resources that could be appropriated in addressing the difficult situations in which many Africans presently find themselves or is it a pious distraction? If it does provide resources to address these situations, as I believe it does, how can these resources be effectively harnessed to help Africans move from positions of victims to agents in a globalizing world? How can Christians join with those of other religions and those of no religion to improve the lives of, and not to hurt or harm, each other? African theologians have discussed what needs to be done for Africa to be transformed in the new global order.⁴⁵ One of the issues that have not been sufficiently stressed is that of reconciliation and trust-building. In many African societies, people have been estranged from each other through colonially created identities, the totalizing tendencies of religion, and the political manipulations of Machiavellian politicians. Can Christianity serve as a reconciling force in these contexts?

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission under the leadership of Desmond Tutu, though much criticized, contributed to a peaceful transition in South Africa. Such initiatives should be encouraged in spite of their shortcomings. Further, in the time of HIV and AIDS, even though some of the churches have become actively involved in fighting against the pandemic, much is still left to be done. The stigma against the disease is still widespread, very few people have access to treatment, and many people are still not well informed about the disease. The church needs to be involved not only in taking care of the sick and in education, but also in the process of seeking a cure for the disease. There is perhaps no better way for the churches to do this than for them to be very actively involved in the political life of their communities, so that the life of the people is not simply abandoned to a class of politicians who do not care for their people. This is a terrible time for the African churches to go into social and political oblivion.

Notes

- 1 See *World Christian Database*, available at: <http://worldchristiandatabase.org.ezproxy.baylor.edu/wcd/esweb.asp?WCI=Results&Query=415>, accessed April 28, 2011.
- 2 Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- 3 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.
- 4 The reasons for the disappearance of Christianity in North Africa (the Maghreb) is complex but the argument here is that the disappearance was partly due to the fact that it

- was no longer perceived as promoting the overall wellbeing of the people. For more on the complexity of explaining this disappearance, see Sawyer and Youhana Youssef, "Early Christianity in North Africa," in *African Christianity: An African Story*, ed. Ogbu Kalu (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007), 62–4.
- 5 Constantinian Christianity is seen negatively because Constantine's toleration of Christianity set the stage for the close connection between religion and the state, a path followed by later rulers such as Theodosius I who made Christianity the state religion.
 - 6 See Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2007). Also see "The Center for Early African Christianity," <http://www.earlyafricanchristianity.com/>, accessed 9 September, 2009. See also David E. Wilhite, *Tertullian the African: An Anthropological Reading of Tertullian's Contexts and Identities* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007); W.C.H. Frend, "Heresy and Schism as Social and National Movements," in *Schism, Heresy, and Religious Protest*, ed. D. Baker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Karla Pollman, *St. Augustine the Algerian* (Göttingen: Duehrkohp and Radicke, 2003).
 - 7 See Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 17; Sundkler and Steed, 2000, 44–6.
 - 8 Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 72–6.
 - 9 Clement of Alexandria, "Who Is The Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?, XI, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol II*, trans. William Wilson (Edinburgh and Grand Rapids: T&T Clark and Eerdmans, 2001 [reprint]).
 - 10 Ibid., XVII.
 - 11 Kamala Parel, "The Disease of the Passions in Clement of Alexandria," *Studia Patristica Vol. XXXVI*, ed., M. F. Wiles and E. J. Yarnold (February 2001), 449–55.
 - 12 Pontius, *The Life and Passion of Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage*, 9, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. V, 9. Also see, *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*, IIID (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1999), 688–9.
 - 13 Ibid.
 - 14 Athanasius, *Letter XXXIX.5*.
 - 15 See Khaled Anatollios, *Athanasius* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 39–86; Thomas G. Weinandy, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007); Dominique Gonnet, "The Salutary Action of the Holy Spirit as Proof of His Divinity in Athanasius' *Letter to Serapion*," *Studia Patristica*, 509–13.
 - 16 John de Gruchy, "From Cairo to the Cape: The Significance of Coptic Orthodoxy for African Christianity," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 99 (November 1997): 44; J. A. (Bobby) Loubser, "How Al-Mokattam Mountain Was Moved: The Coptic Imagination and the Christian Bible," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, ed. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 103–26.
 - 17 De Gruchy, "From Cairo to the Cape," 28.
 - 18 St. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996), Bk. I.
 - 19 See, Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Bk. IV.4.
 - 20 Sundkler and Steed, 2000, 34–6; Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 32–3; Hastings, *The Church in Africa*, 19.
 - 21 See Anderson and Kalu, "Christianity in Sudan and Ethiopia," 69–70; Sundkler and Stead, *A History*, 30–1.

- 22 See David Northrup, *Africa's Discovery of Europe 1450–1850*, 26–53.
- 23 See Hastings, 1996, 10–12; Sundkler and Steed, 2000, 38–9, 928; Wallis Budge, *The Kebra Nagast: The Glory of the Kings* (Silk Pagoda, 2008).
- 24 Hastings, 1996, 40; Sundkler and Steed, 2000, 927.
- 25 Sundkler and Steed, 2000, 40–2, 151.
- 26 Isichei, 1995, Hastings, 1996, 73–7, 104–9.
- 27 See, for example, Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (London: C. Hurst & Co, 2004).
- 28 See Ogbu Kalu, “Ethiopianism in African Christianity,” in *African Christianity*, 227–43.
- 29 This taxonomy does not take seriously the indigenous nature of early Christianity in Egypt (especially Coptic Christianity) and North Africa.
- 30 See Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). See also Allan H. Anderson, *African Reformation* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001), 3–22.
- 31 Vincent Mulago, “Traditional African Religion and Christianity,” in *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (St. Paul Minnesota: Paragon House, 1990), 119–34; Ngindu Mushete, “The History of Theology in Africa: From Polemics to Critical Irenics” in *African Theology En Route*, ed. Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1977), 23–35; Edward Fashole-Luke, “Introduction,” in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, ed. Edward Fashole-Luke et al. (London: Rex Collins, 1978), 357–63.
- 32 See Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992).
- 33 Placide Tempels, *La philosophie Bantoue* (1961 [1945]); Mulago, *Un visage Africain du Christianisme*.
- 34 Mulago, “Traditional African Religion and Christianity,” 123.
- 35 David Ngong. “In Quest of Wholeness: African Christians in the New Christianity,” *Review and Expositor* 103 (Summer 2006): 519–540; and “Salvation and Materialism in African Theology,” *Studies in World Christianity* 15 no. 1 (2009): 1–21.
- 36 Terrence Ranger, “Introduction,” in *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa*, ed. Terrence Ranger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 8–9.
- 37 Paul Gifford, *The Christian Churches and the Democratization of Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998).
- 38 Mveng coined the term “anthropological poverty” to describe the hopeless penury in which many Africans live. Engelbert Mveng, “Impoverishment and Liberation: A theological Approach for Africa and the Third World,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosini Gibellini (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 156.
- 39 Jean-Marc Éla, *African Cry* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), and *My Faith as an African* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).
- 40 See, <http://www.thecirclecawt.org/>. Also see, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).
- 41 For work by Circle members on health see, Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, ed. *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Oduyoye* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006); T. M. Hinga et al., ed., *Women, Religion and HIV/AIDS in Africa: Responding to Ethical and Theological Challenges* (Pietermaritzburg, SA: Cluster Publication, 2008); Musa Wenkosi Dube, *The HIV and AIDS Bible* (Scranton: The University of Scranton Press, 2008).

- 42 Ranger, "Introduction," 22–8.
- 43 Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can be Done About It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5–7.
- 44 Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, "The Rediscovery of the Agency of Africans," in *African Theology Today*, ed. Emmanuel Katongole (Scranton: The University of Scranton Press, 2002), 151.
- 45 See, J.N.K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995); Charles Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-building and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Kä Mana, *Christians and Churches of Africa: Salvation in Christ and the Building of a New African Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004); Emmanuel M. Katongole, *A Future For Africa: Critical Essays in Christian Social Imagination* (Scranton: The University of Scranton Press, 2004).

CHAPTER 14

Coptic Christianity¹

Jason R. Zaborowski

The history of Coptic Christianity must be approached through sources preserved in at least three languages: Greek, Coptic, and Arabic. Many introductory discussions of the Coptic Church explain the etymology of the term “Copt” as a phonetic transcription of the Egyptian words *ha ka ptah* into Greek (*aiguptos* > Egypt), and from the Greek *aiguptos* into Arabic (*aiguptos* > *qibt* > Copt).² It is not clear when exactly the Egyptian Christians began to use the term Copt to identify themselves, but it was during the Islamic period (post-641 C.E.) that the community understood their language, ethnicity, and Christian religion as a cohesive identity centered around the institution of the Coptic Church. The Coptic Church came to be recognized by the Copts as their heritage, and endures to this day for the approximately 8 million Copts who exist in Egypt and in immigrant communities throughout the world.

The Early Christian Period

The story of the Coptic Church is one of disjunction from the other churches of western Christendom and distinction from the dominant Muslim population that has governed Egypt since 641 C.E. Egyptians played a significant role in the formative period of Christianity, at the same time that Christianity played a formative role in Egyptian identity. Coptic is the last stage in the evolution of the Egyptian language that was, in an earlier form, expressed in hieroglyphs, but Coptic was alphabetized with the Greek script (with some Demotic characters). The earliest examples of Coptic writing are translations of the Bible.³

Coptic literature presents many intellectual opportunities for modern students of languages. The prominent Coptic linguist of the twentieth century, Hans Jakob Polotsky (d.1991), labeled Coptic the *lingua sapientissima* and *lingua geometrica* because of its “ineffably subtle syntax;” the words are “so clearly analyzable into their elements that

the Coptic language gives the impression of having been created not by poets, orators, or historians, but 'a severis geometris regulae assuetis.'"⁴

In the wake of Polotsky's scholarship, current Coptic linguists have developed some reliable language tools. Most notably, Bentley Layton and Ariel Shisha-Halevy have recently published grammars of the Sahidic and Bohairic dialects that are significantly more advanced than any previous grammars.⁵ Layton's and Shisha-Halevy's works are important complements to Walter E. Crum's *A Coptic Dictionary*, which is indispensable to the study of Coptic language.

It is probably better to think of the Coptic language in terms of *disuse* rather than label it as dead. People no longer communicate in it as their primary (or secondary) language—although there are often unconfirmed rumors of remotely located families who still use it.⁶ Coptic scholars do read the language, the Bohairic dialect is repeated daily in the liturgy of the Coptic mass, and among the Copts there is deep interest in learning Coptic. Church bookstores in Egypt and among the diaspora offer many rudimentary primers. Many Copts express the hope of one day revitalizing the language.

The earliest evidence of Christianity among the Egyptians appears in the context of the Jewish communities of Alexandria, and early Christian historians claim St. Mark the gospel writer as the founder of the Egyptian church. Fourth-century Christian legends about the origins of Egyptian Christianity appear correlated with the known Jewish communities of Alexandria.⁷ Most significantly, Eusebius of Caesarea's (d. c. 340 C.E.) *Historia Ecclesiastica* established the tradition of tracing the origins of the Egyptian church to the Evangelist Mark.⁸

The codified *Historia Ecclesiastica* does not adequately account for the competing voices of religion in Egypt during the centuries leading up to Roman Christendom; those competing voices have come to light in the Coptic manuscripts found in Nag Hammadi (in Upper Egypt) in 1945. The discovery and study of the Nag Hammadi codices have made a tremendous impact on the scholarship of early Christianity and biblical studies. The gnostic texts have received much attention—especially since Elaine Pagels' book *The Gnostic Gospels* (1979)—as scholars continue to puzzle over the makeup of the communities that produced them.⁹

Although the corpus of gnostic literature from Nag Hammadi will continue to receive research attention, its direct impact on the course of Coptic Christian history is at this point impossible to trace. The Nag Hammadi gnostic community is still unidentified. But the literature has been a very fruitful source for expanding the understanding (as well as confusion) of students of the Coptic language,¹⁰ and has provoked new scholarship on Egyptian Christian monasticism.

From the time of the rise of Christendom, Egyptian Christianity was associated with monasticism. Just as Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, canonized the Markan origins of Egyptian Christianity, the Alexandrian bishop and theologian Athanasius (d. 373) popularized the Egyptian monk St. Antony (c. 251–356) as the founder of Christian monasticism in the *Life of Antony* (c. 357 C.E.). The text was widely disseminated and translated, to lasting effect. The text paints a tableau of Antony as a spiritual hero who became an anchorite, leaving the world by retreating to the desert to do spiritual battle with demons. The *Life* claims that Antony inspired a movement of desert-dwelling monks who flushed out demons to the point that Satan said, "I now have no place, no

weapon, no city. Everywhere there are Christians, and even the desert is already full of monks." Thereby, Antony "made the desert a city."¹¹

James Goehring, in particular, has led the modern scholarly critique of this romanticized view of Christian monastic origins. His own early training in the Nag Hammadi corpus prompted his line of questioning about the origins of monasticism, which in turn has directed the field of monastic studies to recognize how "clean and simple" and "erroneous" are "the views of Antony as the first monk and of Egypt as the source from which his innovation and its developments spread throughout the rest of Christendom."¹²

The monastic traditions of Egypt have been archetypal for the Coptic Christians throughout history, often presenting the monks as the standard bearers of Coptic identity. Surrounding the Antony tradition, a grid of monastic personalities and traditions came to overlay the Egyptian landscape, including the two Saints Macarii, Pachomius, and St. Shenoute. Throughout Coptic tradition the monasteries are the source of candidates for the papacy, and a ritual of chaining and dragging the elected pope from his desert abode symbolizes both the monk's reluctance to leave the desert, and the church's view of the monasteries as wellsprings of religious guidance.¹³

The Coptic language found its most complex and stylized expression in the writings of St. Shenoute (c. 348–465), the archimandrite of the White Monastery in upper Egypt. Shenoute composed numerous canons and sermons for the monastic communities under his charge. There were around 4,000 male and female monks under his leadership, living in two monasteries and a nunnery in and around Atripe (modern day Sohag), in upper Egypt. Parts of his monastery still stand and are currently under archaeological study. His works continued to be copied in the monastery into the twelfth century, though by the fifteenth century the main complex was dilapidated. During the modern period the manuscripts of his writings have become divided up and dispersed by Egyptians selling portions of codices to various Europeans, who supplied the collections of Western museums and libraries. In 1993, Stephen Emmel produced a catalog that translators are now using to reconstruct whole texts from the scattered pieces.¹⁴ Still, most of Shenoute's writings lack critical editions and translations.¹⁵

It is hard to exaggerate the significance of Shenoute to Coptic history, as is partly evident from the fact of the current Coptic Pope's chosen title: Shenouda III (r.1971–present). Shenoute's setting is akin to Pachomian monasticism, yet St. Shenoute's legacy was never included in western Christian monastic traditions. He nonetheless played a role in ecumenical church disputes, and in articulating Egyptian Christology. He probably attended the council of Ephesus (431) and (according to hagiography) punched the heretic Nestorius in the chest.¹⁶ Apart from hagiography, his sermons receive special attention from scholars of Egyptian Christian theology. For example, Shenoute's sermons address important theological topics of his time; in *I Am Amazed*,

Shenoute attacks a wide variety of ideas and practices: belief in multiple worlds based on the reading of apocryphal books, Arian-like Christology, belief in the preexistence of souls, treating the Eucharist as a mere symbol, doubts about the resurrection of the flesh, the exegesis of Origen, the errors of Nestorius, and the evil faith of Mani.¹⁷

Shenoute's sermons also provide important clues into the religious interplay of Egypt at the time. For example, his sermon *The Lord Thundered* frequently contrasts Christians

with “pagans” and “heretics,” derides traditional Egyptian rituals (such as greeting the sun and moon), and mocks Manichaeism and Aristophanes’ plays.¹⁸

Shenoute’s writings articulate an Egyptian form of Christianity at just the moment prior to the conflicts of the council of Chalcedon (451), which divided Christians within Egypt and resulted in the emergence of a non-Chalcedonian Egyptian priesthood. His personality lent itself to a nascent “basic structure” upon which “Egyptian writers grafted characters and stories indigenous to Egypt. These stories . . . enhance[d] the role of Egypt, especially the role of the Copts, in the unfolding of the struggle against the Chalcedonians.”¹⁹

Many have tended to overemphasize the uniformity and rebelliousness of the post-Chalcedonian Egyptian Church, blaming Egyptian nationalism for the Roman empire’s failure to fend off the Arab Islamic conquest of Egypt. However, scholarship has shown that the picture of pre-Islamic Egyptian Christianity is not univocally non-Chalcedonian, and that Egyptian Christians were not prone to reject Roman governance or the Greek language.²⁰ Rather, Egyptian Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians lived side-by-side for many years. It was not until after the Arab Islamic conquests (641 C.E.) that the non-Chalcedonian hierarchy decisively dominated and defined Coptic Christianity.

The schism of the council of Chalcedon stems from a theological dispute over Christology. The council approved the formula for articulating the humanity and divinity of Christ with the phrase, “one Person in two Natures” (*diaphusis*). This formula stated the theology of the Roman (Byzantine) Empire. Over time, the majority of the Egyptian church rejected that formula, and to this day the Chalcedonian schism separates the Copts from Latin and Byzantine Christendom.²¹

The Chalcedonian schism is theological, yet, the Coptic language and the Egyptian sense of regional identity are just as significant factors contributing to the evolution of the Egyptian see of the universal Byzantine (Roman) church into the autocephalous Coptic church. It may be that Coptic literature provided a regionally distinct Christian heritage that facilitated separation from the Christology of the empire. Of course, many Egyptian Christians spoke and wrote in Greek, such as the great theologian hero of the Copts: St. Cyril (d. 444), bishop of Alexandria. Yet, to this day the legacy of St. Cyril literally has become iconic for the modern Copts. That is in part due to the regional identification of Egypt with Alexandria, over and against the other competing patriarchal sees.

Copts under Islamic Governance

The transfer from Roman rule to Arab Islamic rule (641 C.E.) disrupted the written record that comes down to us. The source that is closest to the time period, chronicling the Arab Islamic takeover of Egypt, is today only preserved in Ethiopic, a fact that illustrates the strong connection between Egyptian and Ethiopic churches, as well as the multi-lingual approach necessary to accessing Egyptian history. This text is titled the *Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiou*, written circa 698 C.E.²² Unfortunately, in the translation process from Greek (or perhaps Coptic) to Arabic, and then into Ethiopic, the text now has lacunae and often lacks coherent arrangement. Butler’s seminal work draws substantially from the *Chronicle of John*, claiming this source alone “made it

possible to write a history of the Arab conquest of Egypt," while admitting the source "is a total blank as regards the earlier part of the invasion."²³ Scholars must concede that John of Nikiou (and all the sources postdating it) elaborates a codified view of Egypt that emerged after the conquests—this view reflects the political role of Islam, once it was established in Egypt, and also highlights the post-conquest triumph of non-Chalcedonian Christianity over the Chalcedonians.

The *Chronicle of John* explains the Islamic takeover of Egypt as God's punishment of the Chalcedonians for persecuting non-Chalcedonians:

And every one said: "This expulsion (of the Romans) and victory of the Moslem is due to the wickedness of the emperor Heraclius and his persecution of the Orthodox [*i.e.*, non-Chalcedonians] through the patriarch Cyrus. This was the cause of the ruin of the Romans and the subjugation of Egypt by the Moslem."²⁴

This theological explanation of the rise of Islam was popular in Egyptian literature, and Christians on both sides of the Chalcedonian divide blamed each other for the Islamic conquests.

After the Islamic takeover Christians continued to play a central role in society, even remaining as the majority of the Egyptian population. Egyptian Christians seemed to dominate the bureaucratic offices under Islam even up until the modern period. The Coptic percentage of the population declined under Islam, but the diminishment was not immediate.

In a sense, the Islamic takeover of Egypt facilitated the rise of the autocephalous non-Chalcedonian "Coptic" church: "[I]n fact the ecclesial identities of the enduring churches in the East did not come to their maturity until well after the rise of Islam. This being the case, . . . one must consider the challenge of Islam as itself having been a factor in the Christian, community-building process."²⁵ This Coptic community-building process entailed "absorbing various groups" under non-Chalcedonian leadership and developing a sense of a unified heritage that could be termed (in retrospect) the Coptic Church.²⁶ The label "Coptic Church" is Arabic Islamic parlance, combining the religious institution with what the Arabs called the Egyptian: *al-qibtī*.²⁷ The *Chronicle of John*—written by a non-Chalcedonian after the conquest—still does not use the label "Coptic Church" at all.

From the tenth to the thirteenth century, the Muslim population of Egypt eclipsed that of the Christians, who translated their tradition from Coptic to Arabic. Once arabization began in the tenth century the Copts "went on to produce more texts in Arabic than all the other Christian communities in the caliphate put together."²⁸ The transition from Coptic to Arabic was uneven; the community feared that losing Coptic language would amount to losing their Christian tradition. The Copts' adoption of the Arabic language can be periodized in three stages: 1) 800 to the mid-1000s—a period of "popular and provisional" approaches to arabization; 2) the late 1000s to early 1200s—Copto-Arabic translations "geared by necessity" for those who no longer knew Coptic; and 3) 1200 to 1300—the golden age of Copto-Arabic literature, characterized by "scholarly work on the sources."²⁹

One of the pre-eminent personalities of Copto-Arabic literature is the Coptic Bishop of al-Ashmunayn (Asyut province), Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffa' (c.905–987), the first

known Coptic theologian to write in Arabic. Not just in Egypt, but in “the Arabic-speaking world Severus’s apologetic works have been among the most frequently copied and the most widely disseminated of all Christian texts in the Arabic language.”³⁰ Sawirus has such a legacy that modern-day Copts have even tended to attribute to him authorship of many books he did not write, simply because they are “ancient and in Arabic and representative of the faith of the Coptic Orthodox Church.”³¹

Sawirus’ works attest to arabization, but they also venture into a new theological idiom for “expressing the faith in ‘Islamic’ terms, of formulating the traditional truths of Christianity in Arabic in response to the ever more insistent call to Islam.”³² Sawirus “had an extraordinary command of the Scriptures and the patristic heritage in Coptic, and perhaps in Greek as well,” which he translated into the Arabic Islamic theological form, *’ilm al-kalām*.³³ He was also an experienced debater of the *mutakallimīn* (Islamic scholars of *kalām*), and he is alleged to have publicly debated the Jewish physician of the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu’izz (d. 975 C.E.).³⁴ Sawirus faced the doubly complex challenge of rendering Greek Christological terminology in Arabic, and doing so with Arabic theological language that had already been shaped to suit the logic of Islamic monotheism (which explicitly rejects notions of the Trinity and Incarnation).

It seems clear that during the time of Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffa’ the Bible, parts of the Lectionary, and Church Canons were also translated into Arabic. It was also the period of the anti-Islamic apocalyptic expressions in Coptic and in Arabic (as well as Greek and Syriac). The Arabic *Apocalypse of Samuel of Qalamun* has received special attention in recent years for its explanation of the Arab Islamic takeover of Egypt, the disuse of the Coptic language, and its injunctions against degradation of the monastic orders.³⁵ Unlike the theological works of Sawirus, the popular apocalyptic genre exemplified by the *Apocalypse of Samuel* focuses on abating moral and linguistic assimilation to Muslims:

The Christians will envy them because of their practices, and will eat and drink with them, and play like them, and be merry and commit adultery like them. They will acquire concubines like them and pollute their bodies with polluted, transgressive Hagarene women like them; they will have sex with men like them; and they will steal and curse like them. . . . they will leave behind the beautiful Coptic language by which the Holy Spirit spoke many times from the mouths of our spiritual fathers.³⁶

Ironically, the only extant versions of the *Apocalypse of Samuel* are written in Arabic. The *Apocalypse of Samuel* is also important for expressing the connection between Egypt and Ethiopia. The text prophesies that the king of Rome and the king of Ethiopia will drive the “Sons of Ishmael” out of Egypt and “into the deserts of their fathers.” Then, the king of Ethiopia will marry the princess of Rome, “and there will be great welfare, peace, and agreement on the whole face of the earth for forty years,” after which will come about the earth’s final battle that culminates in Christ’s return.³⁷

The major work of the period from 1000–1200 C.E. was the compilation of the *Arabic History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria (AHPA)*.³⁸ This is the principle source of historical knowledge of the Coptic church in the age of Islam. The *AHPA* was compiled by different editors over the course of centuries and exists in the earliest extant Coptic

recession, which (along with Greek sources) was redacted into Arabic and augmented with new material from the late eleventh century onward. Unfortunately, the Arabic text of the *AHPA* is poorly understood, and a modern critical edition and translation is wanting.

The *AHPA* is organized as a “series of patriarchal biographies” that Maged S.A. Mikhail has likened to an accordion: “Within any grouping, the biographies that are closest to the author’s own time tend to be longer and full of anecdotal information, whereas those farthest from the time of composition tend to be quite terse.”³⁹ It is a varied work that cannot be easily summarized, though a few themes are persistent.

One theme that recurs in the *AHPA* is the integration of Copts into Islamic society. While the *AHPA* refers many times to instances of conversion to Islam, and periods of political pressures to convert, the texts just as often relate a story of cooperation and participation between the Copts and their Islamic government. For instance, in the Fatimid period (969–1171), when the city of Cairo was established, the *AHPA* shows that the church served as a mediator between the Islamic government, the Nubians, and the closely allied Ethiopian church.⁴⁰ In the Ayyubid period (1171–1249) the *AHPA* offers unqualified support for the Sultan Saladin (1136–1193), showing an integration of Coptic and Muslim political interests during the Crusades.

Significant evidence of Coptic language disuse appears in the thirteenth century, when the first-known Coptic-Arabic grammar texts are written. The most prominent of the grammarians was al-As’ad ibn al-’assāl (d. ante-1259), who also translated the Gospels from Coptic into Arabic by the year 1253. Al-As’ad was one of the four famous scribes, the *Awlād al-’assāl* (“the al-’assāl children”), who knew Coptic and Arabic and travelled outside of Egypt, “seeking books and sources for their publications.”⁴¹

During this period the last known Coptic-language literary productions were written: The *Triadon* (1322) and the *Martyrdom of John of Phanijōit* (c.1211). In terms of Muslim–Christian relations, the *Martyrdom of John* relates the story of a Copt who converted to Islam and is eventually martyred under the Ayyubid Sultan al-Kamil (c.1177–1238) on account of his public reconversion to Christianity.⁴² It can be noted that while the *AHPA* indicates Coptic integration into Islamic society at the time of Saladin, the *Martyrdom of John of Phanijōit* is one of the texts that draw a sharp boundary to assimilation and stem the tide of converts to Islam.

The Modern Period

In the modern period Coptic Christians have endured social changes common to all those peoples who underwent imperial rule. Like Egyptian Muslims, the Copts faced questions about the role of religion in a modern nation-state, and the relationship between religion and societal progress. Three periods of modern Coptic scholarship can be discerned. A) In the imperial period, 1798–1952, Copticists held a “textual attitude”⁴³ toward Coptic studies. Scholarship was driven by philological and historical concerns (following in the wake of Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680)),⁴⁴ and it tended to historicize modern living Copts as typifications of their distant past. B) The decolonization period, 1952–1981, is when Egyptians established their independent

nation-state. Scholars of Arab and Egyptian nationalism in particular recognized the Copts as integral to Egyptian society, having participated jointly with Muslims in rebelling against the British. Scholars of Arab nationalism gave attention to modern Copts, but Copts were rarely the focus of these studies. Coptic specialists were still focused on philology and ancient artifacts, yet the Copts themselves commanded attention to their major reforms, particularly in the Sunday School Movement and the revival of monasticism. C) The post-Sadat period, 1981–the present: the state struggled to find a constructive relationship between religion and politics at the time of Sadat's assassination. Sadat sought to curb religious extremism, and even ordered Pope Shenouda III under house arrest on the eve of the president's assassination. Since the early 1980s significant studies have been carried out with a new sensitivity to the Copts as a minority community.

The policies of Muhammad 'Ali (1769–1849) and the following dynasty helped cultivate a modern notion of citizenship among Egyptians, and thus invited Copts into closer equality with the Muslim Egyptians. Muhammad 'Ali's dynasty integrated Copts into the state first by conscripting them into the military, and later abolishing the *jizyah* ("poll tax" assessed on non-Muslim communities) in 1855. But the moves toward an integrated citizenry participating in a non-sectarian government have been incremental and incomplete. Muslim and western scholars of the imperial period viewed the problem in terms of reconciling western values with traditional Islamic values. For Copts the tensions were more complex. Copts have had to assert their identity in response to two fronts: before Muslims and westerners.

In the face of Muslim and British imperial critics, Copts have been prompted to show how the Coptic church would respond to the question of modernization. Protestant missionaries helped shape the imperial discourse of the Copts, upon whom their efforts focused because of their failure to convert Muslims. The imperial orientalist discourse linked imperial power with Protestant religion. One rendition of the argument was articulated by Lord Cromer (d. 1917), the consul general of Egypt from 1882–1907:

If a religious belief cannot adapt itself to the requirements which are constantly cropping up as the world grows older, one of two things will probably happen. Either society advances and the religious belief is stranded and eventually forgotten, or the creed holds society in its grip and bars the way to advancement. It is the proud boast of the Christian religion, and more especially of the Protestant variety of that religion, that it is not obliged to choose between either of these alternatives. It possesses sufficient elasticity to adapt itself to modern requirements.

As far as Cromer was concerned, the only difference between the Copts and Muslims was that one "worships in a Christian church, whilst the" other "worships in a Moham-medan mosque," and neither provided "elasticity" for progress.⁴⁵ Many western writers thought that centuries of Islamicate society left a morally "degrading" mark on the Copts, as Stanley Lane-Poole put it: "The Copt is servile, too often venal, as his patriarchs and bishops were in most periods of the past; he truckles to the great and domineers over the helpless, and in the art of lying stands supreme."⁴⁶ Copts responded with reforms.

Sometimes Coptic reform was carried out within the church, such as under the leadership of Pope Cyril IV (r. 1854–1861), who promoted education through new Coptic schools. But by the late 1800s visions of modernization divided the Coptic community; some wealthier landowning Copts spearheaded the Lay Reform movement, while others reinforced the traditional church hierarchical model for relating to the government. By 1874 lay reformers seemed to promote economic progress and elevated education standards for the clergy: “through secularization of their community activities” the reformers hoped to join the modern western system.⁴⁷

The divide between Coptic lay reformers and traditionalists was even more fractious after the start of the British occupation (1882); by 1912 Copts voiced at least three competing political positions: a) lay-reform supporters of “progress,” loyal to the British; b) nationalist Copts who subsumed religious identity to Egyptian nationalism; and c) traditionalist Copts, mainly guided by the clergy who espoused the old Ottoman political arrangement.

The years 1910 to 1919 were a pivotal timeframe in Coptic–Muslim–western relations. The Coptic lay reformer Butros Pasha Ghali (1846–1910) was appointed prime minister of Egypt by the British in 1908, but assassinated two years later by a Muslim nationalist. In response, lay-reform Copts sent an emissary named Kyriakos Mikhail to London, where he wrote several newspaper articles, and a subsequent book, outlining what he considered the “Coptic Question.”⁴⁸

By 1911 the debate over the Coptic Question was further fueled by a Coptic Congress, which lay-reform Copts convened in Assiut to discuss perceived injustices towards Copts under British rule. The congress was interpreted outside Assiut as anti-Muslim, and Muslims organized their own “Egyptian Congress” in Cairo that same year.⁴⁹ But Copts were clearly divided within. The Coptic Pope Cyril V, representing the traditionalists, opposed the Coptic Congress. Even westerners sympathetic with the Copts evaluated them in terms of their potential for progress. As S.H. Leeder remarked in his ethnography of the Copts at the end of World War I:

It has to be admitted that the rule of sending to the monasteries for all the men who are to govern the Church is the greatest possible hindrance to advance, seeing that these desert institutions have long since sunk to a low level of spiritual life, and to an intellectual poverty which is contemptible. The inspiration and fervour which called them into being, and for a considerable period made them the home of a truly saintly monasticism and the centres of learning, languished long since, and no attempt seems to have been made to check the flood of formalism, ignorance, and indifference which has overwhelmed them.⁵⁰

As the title of Leeder’s book indicates, Copts in the colonial period were evaluated through a historicizing lens. Scholarship written after Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser’s Free Officer Rebellion in 1952 began to recognize the significance of Coptic participation in the earlier Egyptian revolution of 1919. After the intercommunal tensions in the years of WW I, Copts and Muslims united in mass protests against the British in 1919, marking the beginnings of Egyptian nationalist gains, which could be claimed by Copts and Muslims jointly. The Coptic Church itself was beginning to realize spiritual gains of church reform in desert monasticism after Nasser’s revolution.

The monk Matthew the Poor (1919–2006) deserves special note as a reformer. Capturing the attention of *Time* magazine in 1976, Mathew the Poor (Arabic: Mattā al-Maskīn) participated in a revitalization of desert monasticism. Egyptian Christians know him as both a prolific author and one of the final candidates for the papacy now held by Anba Shenouda III. In a sense, Mattā al-Maskīn's desert monasticism offers one answer to the "Coptic Question" by showing that traditional Coptic monasticism can be socially engaged and progressive. Mattā al-Maskīn has "succeeded in bringing the principles of the monastic life—such as self-denial, asceticism, and obedience—into harmony with the needs of a new generation of monks that has grown up in the age of technology."⁵¹

One of Mattā al-Maskīn's most influential books, *The Orthodox Prayer Life*, enjoyed several reprintings, and is now one of only a few of his writings to have been translated (though incompletely) into English.⁵² The book explores a person's interior connection to God the Father through prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. Mattā al-Maskīn draws on the Bible and a variety of church fathers (even outside the Coptic tradition).

Numerous useful studies on modern Copts have been published since the assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat in 1981. Perhaps the most important study in English on modern Copts is Barbara L. Carter's *The Copts in Egyptian Politics*.⁵³ Her book is the first to document in English the Coptic personalities involved in the political activities of the 1919 revolution and its aftermath. She details how, during the revolution, "Murqus Sergius led a huge demonstration to Al-Azhar and was the first Coptic priest to speak from its pulpit." Carter saw the price of this participation would be the loss of their communal distinctives: "Copts came to realize that the price of political acceptance was assimilation, the sacrifice of their ways for those of the majority."⁵⁴ The example of Matthew the Poor shows that even while integrated in society, Copts claim the desert as religious battle ground, but unfortunately, Carter's study does very little to discern what it meant to be "Coptic" in religious terms between 1918 and 1952.

But more and more studies are giving attention to modern Coptic religious life. John Watson's *Among the Copts* is a recent book that devotes attention to Matthew the Poor and the Sunday School movement. S.S. Hasan's *Christians Versus Muslims in Modern Egypt* also focuses on ecclesial matters, particularly the church politics involving Matthew the Poor and Pope Shenouda III in recent years. Nelly van Doorn-Harder's study of Coptic nuns sheds light on a sensitive topic of gender roles and spiritual authority.⁵⁵ And Egyptians are contributing to the discussion as well (although westerners have been slow to recognize their narratives). The Muslim correspondent for the Egyptian daily *al-Ahram* authored a book titled *The Copts in Egypt and Abroad: Conversations with Pope Shenouda*, which praises the pope for having studied Islam, cultivated a relationship with the Shaykh al-Azhar, and thus shown that the pope is "the living symbol who embodies the meaning of national unity" in Egypt.⁵⁶ And, it should be noted that Copts are increasingly collaborating with western scholars in producing scholarship on their tradition.⁵⁷ One important example is the restoration and documentation of historical monuments being jointly led and hosted by western scholars and Coptic monks, who take a personal stake in the preservation of their heritage. Modern Copts are in fact joining western scholars as their emigrant communities grow outside Egypt, and scholarship may increasingly show the Copts are irreducible to, yet inseparable from, their past.

Notes

- 1 This essay is dedicated to Dr. Janet A. Timbie in appreciation of her scholarly guidance.
- 2 See Alastair Hamilton, *The Copts and the West, 1439–1822: The European Discovery of the Egyptian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), esp. pp. 24, 110.
- 3 See Tonio Sebastian Richter, “Greek, Coptic and the ‘Language of the Hijrah’: the Rise and Decline of the Coptic Language in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt,” in *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East*, ed. Hannah M. Cotton, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 401–46, p. 413.
- 4 H.J. Polotsky, “Egyptology, Coptic Studies and the Egyptian Language,” in *Lingua Sapientissima: A Seminar in Honour of H.J. Polotsky Organised by the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge and the Faculty of Oriental Studies in 1984*, ed. J.D. Ray (Cambridge: Faculty of Oriental Studies, 1987), 13, 20, respectively.
- 5 Bentley Layton, *A Coptic Grammar with Chrestomathy and Glossary, Sahidic Dialect: Second Edition, Revised and Expanded with an Index of Citations* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004). Ariel Shisha-Halevy, *Topics in Coptic Syntax: Structural Studies in the Bohairic Dialect* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007). Layton and Shisha-Halevy were Polotsky’s students.
- 6 See The Earl of Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, v. 2 (New York: MacMillan, 1909), 212.
- 7 Birger A. Pearson, “Earliest Christianity in Egypt: Further Observations,” in *The World of Early Egyptian Christianity: Language, Literature, and Social Context, Essays in Honor of David W. Johnson*, ed. James E. Goehring and Janet A. Timbie (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007): 97–112, pp. 98, 99.
- 8 *Historia Ecclesiastica*, II.16, 17. See also Stephen J. Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy: The Egyptian Church and Its Leadership in Late Antiquity* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2004), 12.
- 9 James M. Robinson, “The Jung Codex: The Rise and Fall of a Monopoly,” *Religious Studies Review* 3, 1 (January, 1977): 17–30. See also Philip Rousseau, “The Successors of Pachomius and the Nag Hammadi Codices: Exegetical Themes and Literary Structures” in *The World of Early Egyptian Christianity*, op. cit., 140–57.
- 10 See Bentley Layton’s, *Coptic Gnostic Chrestomathy: A Selection of Coptic Texts with Grammatical Analysis and Glossary* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004).
- 11 Athanasius, *Vita Antonii*, 41 and 14, respectively; 41 trans. Robert T. Meyer, *St. Athanasius: The Life of Saint Antony* (New York: Newman Press, 1950). The phrase “making the desert a city” is curiously absent in the extant Coptic versions.
- 12 James E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International Press, 1999), 13.
- 13 See S.H. Leeder, *Modern Sons of the Pharaohs: A Study of the Manners and Customs of the Copts of Egypt* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), 254.
- 14 Stephen Emmel, *Shenoute’s Literary Corpus*, in *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, vol. 599 (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2004), 13.
- 15 Some recent works on Shenoute: Caroline T. Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies: Discipline and Salvation in Shenoute of Atripe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), Rebecca Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery: Egyptian Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), and Heike Behlmer, *Schenute von Atripe: De Iudicio* (Torino: Ministero per I Beni Culturali e Ambientali, 1996).

- 16 See David N. Bell, trans., *Besa: The Life of Shenoute* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1983), §128–30, pp. 78–9.
- 17 Janet A. Timbie, “Reading and Rereading Shenoute’s *I Am Amazed*: More Information on Nestorius and Others,” in *The World of Egyptian Christianity*, *op. cit.*, 61–71, p. 63.
- 18 See Timbie and Zaborowski, “Shenoute’s Sermon *The Lord Thundered*,” *op. cit.*
- 19 David W. Johnson, S.J., “Anti-Chalcedonian Polemics in Coptic Texts, 451–641,” in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).
- 20 See Jason R. Zaborowski, “Egyptian Christians Implicating Chalcedonians in the Arab Takeover of Egypt: The Arabic Apocalypse of Samuel of Qalamūn,” *Oriens Christianus* 87 (2003): 100–15.
- 21 In 1988, Vatican representatives and those of the Coptic Church, signed a joint statement of Christology that promises to be a first step in resolving the Chalcedonian schism. See H.H. Pope Shenouda III, *The Nature of Christ* (Cairo: Dar el-Tebaa el-Kawmia, 1991), 47. See Stephen J. Davis, *Coptic Christology in Practice: Incarnation and Divine Participation in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- 22 R.H. Charles, trans., *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu, Translated from Zotenberg’s Ethiopic Text* (Oxford: Williams and Northgate, 1916). John was the non-Chalcedonian bishop of Nikiou in the 690s CE.
- 23 Alfred J. Butler, *The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Last Thirty Years of the Roman Dominion*, 2d. ed. Ed. P.M. Fraser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), ix, and 219 fn. 1, respectively. First published in 1902. Butler’s book is a main source for Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live in* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2007), 139–68.
- 24 *Chronicle of John*, CXXI.2.
- 25 Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 129–30.
- 26 Mikhail, “Egypt from Late Antiquity to Early Islam: Copts, Melkites, and Muslims Shaping a New Society” (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2004), 57, who sees post-Islamic empowerment of the non-Chalcedonians as more of a recovery than a new start.
- 27 Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam’s 9th-century C.E. Islamic history of the conquests (one of our earliest Islamic sources) uses the term *al-qibtī* frequently. See Charles Torrey, ed., *The History of the Conquests of Egypt, North Africa, and Spain, Known as the Futūh Misr of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922).
- 28 Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church*, *op. cit.*, 65.
- 29 Periods proposed by Samuel Rubenson, “Translating the Tradition: Some Remarks on the Arabization of the Patristic Heritage in Egypt,” *Medieval Encounters* 2, 1 (1996): 4–14, p. 12. See Mark N. Swanson, “Recent Developments in Copto-Arabic Studies, 1996–2000,” in Mat Immerzeel and Jacques Van Der Vliet, eds., *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millenium: Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies, Leiden, 27 August–2 September 2000* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 239–67, p. 244.
- 30 Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church*, *op. cit.*, 65.
- 31 Mark N. Swanson, “Our Brother, The Monk Eustathius’: A Ninth-Century Syrian Orthodox Theologian Known to Medieval Arabophone Copts,” *Coptica*, 1 (2002): 119–40, p. 120.
- 32 Sidney Griffith, “The Kitāb Misbāh al-‘aql of Severus Ibn al-Muqaffa’: A Profile of the Christian Creed in Arabic in Tenth Century Egypt,” *Medieval Encounters* 2 (1996): 15–42, p. 30.
- 33 Mark N. Swanson, “Our Brother the Monk,” *op. cit.*, 122.
- 34 Sidney Griffith, “The Kitāb Misbāh al-‘aql,” *op. cit.*, 18.

- 35 See Jos van Lent, "The Nineteen Muslim Kings in Coptic Apocalypses," *Parole de l'Orient* 25 (2000): 643–693; Jason R. Zaborowski, "From Coptic to Arabic in Medieval Egypt," *Medieval Encounters* 14 (2008): 15–40.
- 36 Zaborowski, "From Coptic to Arabic," *op. cit.*, p. 24.
- 37 Paris Arabic MS 150, f. 29–29; longer quote f. 29, l. 2–3. My trans.
- 38 For authorship, see Johannes Den Heijer, "Coptic Historiography in the Fā'imid, Ayyūbid and Early Mamlūk Periods," *Medieval Encounters*, 2 (1996): 67–98, esp. 72–7.
- 39 Mikhail, "Egypt from Late Antiquity," *op. cit.*, 21–2. See also Mark N. Swanson, *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt (641-1517)* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010).
- 40 See Marlis J. Saleh, "Government Intervention in the Coptic Church in Egypt during the Fatimid Period," *The Muslim World* 91(2001): 381–97.
- 41 Wadi Abullif Malek Awad, *Studio su al-Mu'taman Ibn al-'Assāl*, in *Studia Orientalia Christiana Monographiae*, no. 5 (Cairo: The Franciscan Centre of Christian Oriental Studies, 1997), 88. My trans.
- 42 Jason R. Zaborowski, *The Coptic Martyrdom of John of Phanijōit: Assimilation and Conversion to Islam in Thirteenth-Century Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). See Maryann M. Shenoda, "Displacing Dhimmī, Maintaining Hope: Unthinkable Coptic Representations of Fatimid Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39 (2007): 586–607, esp. fn. 1 and 78.
- 43 See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), esp. 92ff.
- 44 Athanasius Kircher, S.J., is often considered the first modern Western Coptacist, having edited the Coptic-Arabic scalae of Ibn Kabar (d. 1324) in *Lingua Aegyptiaca Restituta Opus Tripartitum* (Rome, 1643) and written the study of Coptic grammar, *Coptic or Egyptian Forerunner: Prodrōmus Coptus sive Aegyptiacus* (Rome, 1636).
- 45 Cromer, *Modern*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 202, 205.
- 46 Stanley Lane-Poole, *Cairo: Sketches of its History, Monuments, Social Life* (London: J.S. Virtue, 1898, Reprint New York: Arno Press, 1973), 206.
- 47 Airi Tamura, "Ethnic Consciousness and its Transformation in the Course of Nation-building: The Muslim and the Copt in Egypt, 1906–1919," *The Muslim World* 75, 2 (April, 1985): 102–14, p. 108.
- 48 Kyriakos Mikhail, *Copts and Moslems under British Control: A Collection of Facts and a Rsum of Authoritative Opinions on the Coptic Question* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1911).
- 49 See C.A. Bayly, "Representing Copts and Muhammadans: Empire, Nation, and Community in Egypt and India, 1880–1914," in *Modernity and Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean*, ed. Leila Tarazi Fawaz *et al.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002): 158–203, p. 179.
- 50 S.H. Leeder, *Modern Sons of the Pharaohs*, *op. cit.*, 252.
- 51 Gottfried Glassner, "Erneuerung im Zeichen der Mönche: Das Aufblühen der koptischen Klöster und das Reformwerk des Mattā al Maskīn," in *Die koptische Kirche: Einführung in das ägyptische Christentum*, ed. Albert Gerhards and Heinzgerd Brakmann (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1994): 93–104, p. 97–9. My trans.
- 52 Father Matta El-Meskeen, *Orthodox Prayer Life: The Interior Way* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003).
- 53 B.L. Carter, *The Copts in Egyptian Politics, 1918–1952* (London: Croom Helm, 1986). See the forthcoming by Vivian Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt: The Challenges of Modernisation and Identity* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2010).
- 54 *Ibid*, 62 and 293, respectively.

- 55 John H. Watson, *Among the Copts*, *op. cit.* S.S. Hasan, *Christians Versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Hasan over emphasizes conflict and much of the interview data is hard to confirm; Pieterella van Doorn-Harder, *Contemporary Coptic Nuns* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995). Nelly van Doorn-Harder and Kari Vogt, eds., *Between Desert and City: The Coptic Orthodox Church Today* (Oslo: Novus Forlag, 1997).
- 56 Ragab al-Banā, *al-āqbāt fī misr wa-l-mahjar: hiwārāt ma' al-bābā šanūdāh* (Cairo: dār al-m'ārif, 1998), 59. My trans.
- 57 Please see Magdi Guirguis and Nelly van Doorn-Harder, *The Emergence of the Modern Coptic Papacy: The Egyptian Church and Its Leadership from the Ottoman Period to the Present* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2011).

CHAPTER 15

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church

Christine Chaillot

Short History

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is the most ancient Church in Black Africa. Ezana, king of Aksum (a town situated in the northern part of present Ethiopia), was the first king to adopt Christianity with his court and people; he proceeded to make Christianity the official religion of his kingdom. This conversion was due to Frumentius who was originally from Tyre in present Lebanon. Frumentius was ordained in Alexandria by Patriarch Athanasius to be the first bishop of Ethiopia. Thus the Ethiopian Church was canonically founded in the middle of the fourth century. Many believe that there might have been Christians in Ethiopia before that time, such as the Ethiopian eunuch baptized by Philip on his way back from his pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Acts 8:26–40). After Frumentius, all the bishops of Ethiopia were Coptic Orthodox metropolitans sent from Egypt, until 1959 when the Ethiopian Orthodox Church became autocephalous. One of those bishops, Yaqob, who arrived in 1337, is known for his many activities such as reorganization of the Ethiopian Church and evangelization in new areas. Even though the Christians of Ethiopia were ruled for centuries by a Coptic bishop, the people should not be called “Coptic” as the word means “Egyptian.” The first evangelization developed around Axum. A second period of evangelization took place in the late fifth or early sixth century with the arrival of the Nine Saints who came from the Eastern Mediterranean area and who introduced monastic life in Ethiopia. In the region of Axum they organized monasteries from where Christianity was taught and spread.

In Ethiopia, it is impossible to speak separately of history and Church, as both are so completely connected. After the fall of the Axumite kingdom (about the ninth to tenth centuries), the main capitals, historical centres, and Christianity developed in the south: in Lalibela (in Lasta) which was the capital at the beginning of the thirteenth century of the Zagwe dynasty (tenth to thirteenth centuries), then in Amhara region (Wollo) with the so-called Solomonic dynasty (from about 1270). Gradually Christian

settlements began in Amhara region from the tenth century, and to the west in Shoa from the thirteenth century, and then more to the south. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Ethiopian kingdom expanded, especially under King Amde Tseyon (1314–1344), and also under his followers, near Lake Tana and the far south. King Zara Yaqob (1434–1468) consolidated the expansion of the previous centuries. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the kingdom included the regions of Wollo, Tigray, Begemder, eastern and northern Gojam, and Shoa. The rulers of Ethiopia maintained contacts and traded in the region and beyond; the first contacts with the Europeans took place around the end of the fourteenth century.

The maximum extension of the kingdom took place in the sixteenth century, just before the invasion from the south east by Muslims led by Gagn (1527–1543). These forces destroyed churches, and killed monks as well as members of the clergy. Some Christians converted to Islam. The loss of the Church's cultural heritage was then very important. With the help of the Portuguese, the Ethiopian King Galawdewos retook only some part of the previous Ethiopian kingdom. The Court then settled for a short time near Lake Tana (sixteenth/early seventeenth century). In the seventeenth century, the new capital remained in Gondar for more than two centuries. From the nineteenth century, the country began modernization under Emperor Menelik II (1889–1913). In 1887, Addis Ababa became the new capital. In 1889, Italians established a colony in Eritrea. In 1896, Emperor Menelik defeated the Italians at the Battle of Adwa, a defeat which is seen as a first and great victory by an Africa nation over a European colonial power.

In 1917, Tafari, a cousin of Menelik, was declared regent and heir; he was crowned in 1930 under the name of Emperor Haile Selassie I, which means "the Might of the Trinity." He continued with the modernization started by Menelik. In 1935–36 the Italians occupied Ethiopia. The emperor had to leave the country. In July 1936, the Ethiopian bishops Petros and Mikael were executed because they had opposed the Italians invading Ethiopia. Many Ethiopian ecclesiastics joined and helped the Resistance. The Italians massacred many Ethiopians, including at the Monastery of Debre Libanos in 1937. In 1941, the British entered Eritrea and Ethiopia. Thus Ethiopia was freed from the Italian occupation and Emperor Haile Selassie returned to Addis Ababa in May 1941. Eritrea became an independent country in 1993 and an autonomous patriarchate was created there in 1998. Before that, Eritrea was one of the dioceses of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

In September 1974, Emperor Haile Selassie was deposed and his unexplained death was announced in August 1976. Until then the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was the official state religion of the country, and was seen as a symbol of national unity. The king or emperor was the guardian to keep the Orthodox faith. After the 1974 Revolution, a military council (*Derg*) installed a Socialist and Marxist Republic which lasted till 1991. This regime regulated and controlled the religious sphere. During this period, the Church went through some great changes. But the Christians never stopped going to Church, even though the regime was organizing political meetings in the town and village quarters (*kebele*) at the same time as Church prayers were taking place. In 1975, the Marxist regime nationalized most properties, including Church properties, and then distributed them. However, after 1991 some of the Church properties, other than land,

were given back. This and the contributions of parishes are now the main Church income. In 1976, Patriarch Theophilos was arrested, detained without trial, and eventually executed. Other archbishops and clergy were imprisoned. The years 1977–78 were difficult and bloodstained years for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Theology/Christology

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is part of the family of the Oriental Orthodox Churches together with the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Syrian and Malankara Orthodox Churches, and the Armenian Church. In 1965, Emperor Haile Selassie organized a Conference in Addis Ababa to gather all the sister Oriental Orthodox leaders. Following the Coptic Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church acknowledged the first three ecumenical councils: Nicaea (325), Ephesus (341), and Constantinople (381). It also followed the Coptic Orthodox Church in rejecting the formula of the Council of Chalcedon (451) which accepted the “one person in two natures (*physeis*)” referring to Christ being God and Man, because they then understood and feared a division in Christ by speaking of “two natures,” a splitting of Christ oneness. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church considers both Eutychius and Nestorius as heretics. All the Oriental Orthodox Churches remained faithful to the formula of Cyril of Alexandria speaking of one *physis* of God the Word incarnate. In that context the word *physis* is equivalent to the word “person” used in Chalcedon. “God the Word” speaks of the divinity of Christ, and “incarnate *physis*” of His humanity. The official name of the Church is the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. The word Tewahedo, meaning “made one,” emphasizes the inseparable unity of the Godhead/divinity and Manhood/humanity in the Person of Christ. As do the other Orthodox Churches, the Ethiopian Church call the Virgin “Mother of God” (*Theotokos*).

In 1970, in an official Church text (Motovu and Wondmagegnehu, 1970:96–100, also in Chaillot, 1998:82–3) the Ethiopian Orthodox Church prefers to be called “non-Chalcedonian” and refuses to be called “monophysite” as she rejects the heretic Eutyches. It is then said that this Church believes that “Christ is perfect God and perfect Man, at once consubstantial with the Father and with us; the divinity and the humanity continuing in Him without mixture or separation, confusion or change . . .” In 1971, Patriarch Theophilos issued a faith confession, including Christology. Since the 1960s, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has carried out a theological dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox and the Catholic churches. In 1996, under the present Patriarch Paulos, the Church released a publication titled *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church*, which among others discussed the relations with Chalcedonian Churches saying that there is no christological disagreement with them. In 1555, Emperor Galadewos had written a famous faith Confession. In the nineteenth century, Emperor Yohannes IV (1872–1889) adopted the principle of “one faith in one country.”

Modern Organization of the Church

In 1881, Emperor Yohannes IV obtained four Coptic bishops from Egypt instead of one. One of them, Petros, was appointed Metropolitan. Yohannes’s successor, Menelik II

(1189–1913), did not enforce Christian faith upon everybody, but cared mostly for the unity of the Church. He obtained the cooperation of the new Metropolitan, Matewos, in Ethiopian internal policies. The first modern Ethiopian school was then opened, under the control of the Church. During this period, the Metropolitan's office was established in Addis Ababa. Since the 1920s, the future Emperor Haile Selassie showed his concern about Church reforms. In 1926, the Holy Synod was established. In 1929, the next Coptic Metropolitan was appointed and five Ethiopian monks ordained diocesan bishops. This was a first step to the autocephaly of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In 1948, five Ethiopian monks were consecrated bishops in Cairo. In 1951, the first Ethiopian archbishop was consecrated. In June 1959, the first Ethiopian patriarch was consecrated, Basilios.

In 1942, the Church published the "Regulations for the Administration of the Church" (*Nagarit Gazeta*), a document which was the first modern official document concerning the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. From the 1960s, modern Church educational institutions and social activities began to be established. The Theological School was opened in Addis Ababa in 1944. In 1972, the "Regulations of the Parish Administration Council" (or Parish Council, established as an autonomous body under each diocesan Administration) of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church were issued by the Holy Synod. The Parish Council General Assembly is composed of the Patriarch (as chairman), all members of the Holy Synod (that is all diocesan bishops and archbishops), the General Administrator of the Church as general secretary, heads of the Patriarchate departments, the executive Secretary of the Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (DICAC) as well as an equal number of the clergy and the laity (men and women including youths) from each diocese, which allows a direct participation for the laity.

From the mid-1960s, the Church began attempts to get involved in development programs. In 1972, one commission for Development and Inter-Church Aid (DICAC) was established to serve as the development wing of the Church to carry out development and training, and provide relief activities. In addition, every church association (*sanbate* and *mahbär*) conducts social activities that would provide assistance to the poor and needy. It is also customary for the faithful to give offerings to the churches or monasteries, especially on festivals; on baptisms, weddings, and funerals; on prayers of commemoration of the dead (*taskar*), and other meetings.

According to the statistics of the Ethiopian Church, in 2000, (without the diaspora) there were over 32,537 local parish churches including other churches: "higher churches" (*debre*), rural churches (*getar*), and monasteries (*gedam*); about 364,765 clergy (priests, deacons), teachers, cantors (*debteras*), and lay church workers. In 2001, the Church was divided into thirty-eight dioceses, and again divided into districts. In 2002, there were forty-six archbishops and bishops members of the Holy Synod. Since the late 1970s, the organization of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church departments has remained more or less the same, but some units or departments have become "organizations" or "centres." In 2002 there were ten departments in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church: the Evangelical and Missionary Activities; the Education (for traditional and modern schools), the Clergy training centres (since 1972), Saint Paul's Theological School and the Holy Trinity Theological College; the Departments of Ecclesiastical Affairs, of Monastic Affairs, of the Sunday School (since 1973), of Administration, of

Finance and Budget, of the Registration and Preservation of the Ecclesiastical Treasury, as well as of Planning and Development. There were two organizations: Child and Family Affairs dealing with orphans and destitute children; and Rental House and Building Management. Other official but less important centers include Ecclesiastical Vestment Production and Distribution; Ecclesiastical Objects of the Kulubi Monastery (a famous pilgrimage centre) with gifts from the pilgrims; and the Gofa Technical Training Centre.

Spiritual Life

Some people regard some Ethiopian customs to be of Judaic influence, such as circumcision, dietary laws like not eating pork, etc. But such customs are not specifically Jewish and can also be found in African and other traditions. According to the “national saga,” the *Kebre Negest* (fourteenth century), the kings of Ethiopia were regarded as direct descendants of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba through their son Menelik. According to Ethiopian tradition, the Ark of the Covenant was then brought from Jerusalem to Ethiopia, where it is said to be kept until today in Axum. The altar-tablet (*tabot*), put in every Ethiopian Orthodox church for its consecration and kept for the celebration of every liturgy, is seen as a symbolic replica of the Ark. For festivals the *tabot* is carried in procession by the priests around the church, three times.

Being related to the Coptic Church for seventeen centuries, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has kept the same sacraments (baptism, anointing of the sick, marriage, etc.) and Church calendar. The New and Old Testament as well as patristic and other books were translated into Geez, the ancient language of the Church and of Christian people of Ethiopia. According to Ethiopian tradition, such translations into Geez were begun by the Nine Saints in the late fifth century. Geez is still used today in the liturgical life, together with some Amharic (the modern official language of Ethiopia) and some of the main Ethiopian languages such as Oromo and Gurage.

The spiritual tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is similar to that of other Oriental Orthodox Churches (of the Armenian, Syriac, and Coptic traditions) and of Eastern Orthodox Churches (Greek, Russian, etc.) when it comes to the veneration of the Virgin, saints, and martyrs, and their relics and icons and the cross, as well as fasting and spirituality in general. Babies are baptized and receive the ritual for confirmation with chrism (*meron*) at the same time and then immediately receive communion during the following liturgy. Deacons and priests are married.

Of the fourteen anaphoras, the Anaphoras of the Apostles is the most frequently used. Ethiopian Church music was initiated by Yared in the sixth century. The shape of the church is usually circular (and so similar in shape to the village houses) and divided into three: sanctuary (*maqdas*), holy (*qeddest*), and vestibule (*gene mahelet*), where the cantors (*debteras*) stand. Rock-hewn churches are numerous in the northern region of Tigray and around Lalibela.

The most celebrated Church festivals in Ethiopia are Easter claiming the joy of the Resurrection of Christ, the Epiphany (*Timkat*) or commemoration of the Baptism of

Christ (11 *Terr*/19 January), and the Feast of the Cross (17 *Maskaram*/27 September). Fasting times are strictly followed throughout the year before great festivals (about 250 days), usually until noon or 3 p.m., every Wednesday and Friday, and especially during Holy Week during which many prostrations are made for repentance, as is the case in other Oriental Churches. People make frequent pilgrimages to holy places and, when possible, to the holiest place, Jerusalem. As Jerusalem is such a long journey, Lalibela, considered as a second Jerusalem, is an optional pilgrimage site. Other famous pilgrimage places include the old city of Axum, and monasteries such as that of Gishen Mariam where a relic of the Cross is kept, of Debre Libanos, of Kulubi for the feast of Archangel Gabriel, and of saint Gebre Manfas Qeddus (perhaps fourteenth century) on top of Zeqwala mountain. The faithful go there with specific wishes believing that their wishes will be fulfilled, which does happen regularly. There are places famous for their holy water (*tsebel*) which can cure physically, mentally, and spiritually.

It is estimated that there are about 800 monasteries in Ethiopia. Monastic life began in Tigray, in the north of Ethiopia, with the Nine Saints. In south Wollo, the Monastery of Debre Estifanos is also called Hayq Abuna Iyasus Moa, after the name of its founder (thirteenth century). The Monastery of Giyorgis of Gasitsha (d. 1425) is found in South Wollo. Giyorgis studied in the Hayq Monastery and was the most prominent scholar of his time. The Monastery of Mahabere Selassie, West of Gondar city, is reached after a long walk (6 to 8 hours), because it is so isolated, as are many of the monasteries in Ethiopia. There the community follows the strictest cenobitic rule, when monks have a community life. There are several monasteries on Lake Tana, among which are that of Saint Stephen (Daga Estifanos) where the remains of some Ethiopian kings are kept as well as those of the founder of the monastery, Hiruta Amlak (fourteenth century), a disciple of Iyasus Moa. The main monastery in Shoa is that of Debre Libanos, founded in about 1284 by Saint Tekle Haymanot, the national saint of Ethiopia.

One of the most well-known eremitic sites of Ethiopian monasticism is located in the remote and wild area of Waldebba (in the Tigray and Gondar provinces). In 2000, it was estimated that there were about one thousand monks, nuns, and hermits (*bahetawis*). They follow a specific ascetic way; some hermits carve holes in big trees to create a place to stand inside and pray. This is an ascetic practice which reminds one of the extreme asceticism of the Desert Fathers in Egypt during the first Christian centuries.

For centuries, these monasteries and churches were the only centres of education. Ecclesiastics frequently assisted the monarchs. The traditional education of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is to teach and learn orally, which is unique in the Christian tradition. Students are taught to learn how to read and write from Christian texts; they begin with the First Letter of John and the Psalms. There are different schools to study the Church music (*degwa*, *zema*, *qedasse*, *aqwaqwam*), the Books of the Old and New Testaments, the Book with extracts from Church Fathers, and the Book with writings of the Monks. All these subjects are taught in traditional schools of the Church, in parishes, and in monasteries. During certain lessons, the teacher gives commentaries. There are classes to learn how to compose poems (*qene*) which must have two levels of understanding, the direct one (*sem*) and the hidden or symbolic and spiritual one (*worq*).

The Ethiopian Christian Diaspora and Ethiopian Orthodox Missionary Activities

The Ethiopian Christian diaspora in the twentieth century began with the Revolution of 1974, and continued in the mid-1980s because of drought and famine forcing resettlement schemes. These people first went to neighboring countries, especially Sudan. From there many moved to Egypt, Europe, and North America. This explains how parishes of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church were settled in these places, with priests usually sent from Ethiopia. There are several Ethiopian Orthodox Churches and monasteries in the Holy Land, headed by an archbishop residing in Jerusalem.

In Ethiopia, since 2000, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has launched an internal missionary activity to provide a counter-proselytization from other Churches, and also spread the message of their faith all around the country not only through councils, but also by Sunday school students, theological students, and other members of the church.

The phenomenon of having missionary activities abroad began in an unexpected way, when some descendants of African people in the Caribbean islands showed an interest, among them some Rastafarians. As early as 1952 an Ethiopian Orthodox priest was sent from Ethiopia to Trinidad. The same year a church was established in Georgetown, in British Guyana. In 1970 a church was opened in Kingston, Jamaica. Then missionary activity expanded under the request of Caribbean people in Canada, the USA, the UK, and in other places in the Caribbean. In 1972, an Archdiocese of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church for the Western Hemisphere was established, with its first seat in Trinidad. In 1990, the Ethiopian Orthodox Bishop Yesehaq ordained four priests and twelve deacons and baptized thousands of people in South Africa, all of Protestant origin. In 2001, 33 parishes with their priests and faithful of Protestant origin joined the Ethiopian Orthodox patriarchate. When black Christians discover the existence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, they regarded it as a Church developed with an indigenous African Christian tradition, that of the oldest black African Christianity, having a unique culture; and then some become eager to be part of that tradition.

Statistics of religions are very difficult to establish and vary greatly according to different sources. In 2002, the population of Ethiopia was estimated to be about 65.4 million. About half were Christians with the great majority of them being Orthodox. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church estimated that there were more than 34 million Orthodox Christians in the country. Especially since the nineteenth century, missionaries have been active in Ethiopia: today there are less than half a million Catholics and more than 6 million Protestants (some Protestants say more than 15 million!).

The Catholics were present in Ethiopia since the coming of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, but the first attempt to introduce the Roman Catholic faith failed under King Fasilidas (1607–1632). Protestant missionary activity started in the 1830s. Orthodox Ethiopians have opposed missionary activities in their homeland until today. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has been a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) since its beginning in 1948. It has also been a founding member of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) since 1963.

CHAPTER 16

African Theology¹

Elias K. Bongmba

African theology is critical analysis of thought and praxis that draws its subject matter and themes from the Christian tradition and the African World including but not limited to texts, artifacts, traditions, culture, and social and political experience of Africans. Early Christian theology was deeply rooted in Africa where the intellectual traditions of North Africa and later Ethiopia gave shape to doctrinal expression and methodological approaches. In that context as today, theology emerged from individual reflection and institutional beliefs and practices. The Ecumenical Council of Nicaea adopted a confession that outlined a theological statement.

Leading theologians in North Africa included Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, Athanasius, and Augustine. Following the decline of the Church in North Africa, theological reflection in the Middle Ages was concentrated in the Coptic Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In the modern period, European explorers and colonizers took the Christian faith back to Africa and the Portuguese experiment with the Christian kingdom of Kongo gave rise to local theology as Beatrice Kimpa Vita invoked Saint Anthony, the great monastic of North Africa, for her theological vision. She also claimed that Jesus was an African; and that she had conceived a child through the power of the Holy Spirit like Mary. Her teachings were condemned and she was burned at the stake. In 1652 Dutch sailors arrived the Cape Coast, South Africa and when other Dutch settlers came they claimed that they were a new Israel and God had given that land to them. Later on theologians crafted ideas which in the long term were used to justify the doctrine of apartheid.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, new ecclesial groups dedicated to retrieving African identity started to meet in Nigeria and in South Africa. Bengt Sundkler discussed some theological issues that led to the formation of African Initiated Churches (AIC) in his groundbreaking work, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*. The new AICs wanted theology and church life to reflect African realities. Intellectual and political movements like Pan-Africanism rallied Africans to define and reclaim the idea of Africa. Edward

Wilmont Blyden rejected negative images of Africa imposed by colonizers and also emphasized the role of indigenous religions and Islam in formulating religious ideas on the continent. The literary movement *Négritude*, also offered a conceptual grid on which to think about the idea of blackness. Placide Tempels' 1995 groundbreaking and controversial book, *Bantu Philosophy*, influenced theological thinking and Alexis Kagame, in light of *Bantu Philosophy*, used his language, *Kinyarwanda*, to analyze categories of being in Rwanda. Later in South Africa, theologian P. Greonwald used the Bible to justify apartheid by arguing that human beings could not impose unity on all people in the country because God rejected human attempts to impose unity by destroying the Tower of Babel. The Spirit also gave believers the ability to speak different languages on that day of Pentecost to demonstrate the human unity cannot be forced on all people. Greowald described this separation in terms of blood purity that justified separation of races in South Africa.

The first significant work on theology, *Des Prete Noirs s'interrogent*, called for the Africanization of Christianity. Theological studies were carried out at institutions in South Africa, Nigeria, Cameroon, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Several institutions provided a forum for rigorous theological discourse including the Institute of Contextual Theology, The Christian Institute, both in South Africa, The Circle of concerned African Women Theologians, The Center for Constructive Theology, and the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, to name a few.

Debate on Methodology

Debate on theological method in Africa surfaced at the Catholic University of Kinshasa where participants discussed critical scientific methodology and contextual dimensions of theology that takes seriously the African experience.² A. Vanneste, Dean of the faculty insisted that Catholic theology was a universal project and a unique methodology for Africa could marginalize African theologians. Mulago gwa Cikala argued that theologians should also employ indigenous ideas to adapt Christian theology in Africa. Tharcisse Tshibangu, President of the University and Bishop of Kinshasa, criticized the dominant role imposed on theological discourse by Aristotelian categories because such an approach neglected the synthetic, existential, and holistic worldview of Africans. He argued that the universality of categories also implied inclusivity, which allows Africans to ground theology in their world view.³ V.Y. Mudimbe has argued:

One understands that the condition, in fact, implies a silent comparison between, on the one hand, the scientific dignity of historical, exegetical, and philosophical methods which traditionally have been faithful auxiliary sciences of the Western practice of theology and, on the other hand, the vague and shifting methodological principles of anthropological knowledge invoked by African theologians.⁴

Vanneste's position stressed theological pluralism involving an approach that would consider real life issues on the continent.

South African theologian James Cochrane in *Circles of Dignity* (1999) explores a critical contextual method for theology that appreciates the local, the Christian tradition, and its texts.⁵ Cochrane argues that “local” theologies are connected to the *sensus fidei*, and bring a social intelligibility because they are rooted in local knowledge.⁶ Local theological reflection uses what Jürgen Habermas has called “mundane reasoning.”⁷ Theologians use ordinary language to shape critical thought and offer perspectives on praxis. What counts for rationality is intelligibility that results from appropriate use of language in an “intersubjectively shared background” which encompasses the totality of the life world. Cochrane’s work stems from his engagement with the Amawoti Base Ecclesial Community in the Kwazulu Natal in South Africa where theological activity was grounded in their life world, highlighted a shared world, new ideas, different phases of knowledge—the cultural, social, and personal parts of the shared life world.⁸ This incipient theology destabilizes systematic theology because local wisdom reflects the context of the ordinary reader.⁹ “Context means the gathering of a range of otherwise disparate discourses and actions into a coherent, complex, and communicatively established perspective on the common struggles and legitimate aspiration of the community,” which Cochrane calls *gestalt theology*, a holistic approach which remains partial and tentative.¹⁰

Tanzanian theologian Charles Nyamiti has employed a scientific methodology grounded in the view that faith is the starting point for theology although the theologian does not need to “have living faith, theology is essentially *intellectus fidei*; [and] the quality of one’s theology will necessarily be determined by the depth of his faith, as well as his ‘intellect’ (i.e. his science and intellectual acumen.”¹¹ Nyamiti argues that the *imago dei* in human beings includes intellect and reason to ground logical conclusions about the mysteries of faith. Nyamiti argues that although mythopoetic language is important to theology, it is vague and filled with ambiguity. Faith provides a basis for a theological worldview that is superior to human wisdom constructed from the content of myths.¹² Nyamiti retains the infallibility of the magisterium over theological reasoning, a position difficult to sustain in the modern/postmodern period. He recognizes the limitations of a strictly faith approach to theology because the idea of revelation imposes limitations to the sources and one cannot claim to understand all divine mysteries. Theologians should also use a variety of motifs to organize and conceptualize theology: including salvation history, liberation, contextual thought, to broaden the themes of theology. Nyamiti still considers theology the queen of the sciences. Mika Vähäkangas argues: “It is, however, problematic to lift theology to a position ‘greater than life’, since in that case theology is in danger of losing its academic quality because of becoming such a normative discipline.”¹³

Theological Thinking Today

The task of the theologian is to articulate rationally ideas found in the texts, oral narratives, local religious worldviews, and philosophical perspectives, as well as the cultures and contexts of the theologian and to employ a rigorous interpretation of the religious symbols. In the African context, this calls for a critical analysis

and reconstruction of religious symbols, clear definitions of terms, and a critical appropriation of the text and materials of the religious traditions and cultures. The reasonableness of theology then calls for critical attention to the language, context, and use of appropriate symbols of indigenous religious tradition.

We can now cautiously affirm that the task of theology is to offer critical perspectives on the nature of religious experience and praxis. Friedrich D.E. Schleiermacher, in his *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, argued that theology is a scientific activity to the extent that scholars exchanged ideas in an autonomous atmosphere that allowed individual development of God consciousness.¹⁴ This move removed transcendental and historical approaches to theology. David Tracy has argued that theology as a discipline responds to three publics, the academy, the ecclesial community, and the public. The human context shapes one's interpretive perspective and the texts from which one derives theological imagination. Postmodern thought has brought appreciation for mystical and theological thought by questioning the epistemological dominance of the scientific paradigm in light of Thomas Kuhn's historicist perspectives on scientific theories. The theological task could be further refined by considering several ideas about the nature of the discipline.

First, theology is public, critical, and contextual activity. As a public discipline, theology's truth claims are adjudicated in open and unbiased discourse, using language critically to develop and reflect on ideas. Second, theology is a linguistic activity. It requires what Paul Tillich called semantic rationality meaning that "the language of the theologian cannot be sacred or revealed language . . . The two things s[he] must watch . . . are semantic clarity and existential purity."¹⁵ The linguistic character of theology underscores the contextuality of the theological enterprise.¹⁶ It is for this reason that studies by Alexis Kagame grounded on local linguistic categories should receive new critical appreciation. Third, theology is a temporal activity and a *grenzwissenschaft*,¹⁷ and theological constructions are temporal propositions, open to rethinking and amendments. This implies and invites a radical humanization and temporalization of theological enterprise.

Finally, theology is an intersubjective engagement. Emmanuel Levinas has articulated a compelling vision of alterity that is defined by the human face. Encounter with a human face affirms our own humanity and invites us to responsibility for the other. This is important for theology because Levinas argues that the appropriate way of knowing God lies outside Being, intelligibility, and rationalism.¹⁸ "We will say that the idea of God breaks up the thought which is an investment, a synopsis, and a synthesis, and can only enclose in a presence, re-present, reduce to presence, or let be."¹⁹ Attempts to demonstrate the reality of God through human wisdom could be futile. According to Levinas one knows God through the ethical command because divine presence invites us to a praxis, which Levinas describes, as "desire for that which is beyond being is disinterestedness, transcendence-desire for the Good."²⁰ Rather than present a negation of the idea of divinity, the prophetic word of the Hebrew Bible offers a way of thinking about divinity because it gives life to hearers. Transcendence is not grounded on revelation and resists objectification even if it is located in the ethical deed.²¹ Although Levinas indicates that he has given up on theology, his philosophical perspec-

tive opens the door to think the idea of God in an intersubjective context where the face of the other is irreducible.

The Bible and Theology in Africa

The Bible is a critical source of theological material for many scholars. The first major translation of the Bible took place in Africa when seventy Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Bible (Septuagint) into Greek.²² Translations of the Bible into local languages have made the text available to local communities. Itumeleng Mosala's (1989) materialist reading of the biblical text explored structural relationships (cultural, racial, gender) and argued that critical reading of the biblical text ought to highlight the historical and cultural struggle of black people in South Africa. Musa Dube employs a postcolonial feminist biblical interpretation to explore the conditions of people in the former colonies. Dube also engages in a literary reading of the text to analyze construction of character, place, travelers, and gender relations to inquire the different ways in which texts provided justification for colonialism and the situation of dependency in former colonies. *The Bible in Africa* edited by Gerald West and Musa Dube is a massive book which discusses the transaction and reading of the bible in the African context (West and Dube, 2000). The book has five parts; the first discussing historical and hermeneutical perspectives that have provided a road map for reading the Bible in Africa; this is followed by the different encounters people have had with different biblical texts and the reading they have brought to the table. In part three, the authors have discussed different translations in light of African culture. In part four, the authors explore new boundaries for biblical interpretation and scholarship in Africa. The last part has a bibliography on biblical scholarship in Africa.

Types of Theology

Twentieth-century African theology have been studied from two broad motifs: African cultural theology, which stresses inculturation and adaptation of Christianity to Africa, and liberation/black theology in South Africa deployed to fight racial discrimination and apartheid. First, political and liberation theologies (contextual and Black theology) responded to colonialism, apartheid, neocolonial, and later postneocolonial marginalization in Africa. African theologians have emphasized socio-cultural ideas but did not give enough attention to political issues. It is for that reason that Jean Marc Ela (1986, 1988) called for human liberation to counter the political culture that dehumanized Africans. Bongmba (2006) has offered a critical assessment of power in the postneocolonial state.

Liberation and Black prophetic theologies emerged in South Africa in response to apartheid, inspired by theological developments in Europe, Black theology in the United States of America, and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. In a show of solidarity, anti-apartheid theologians in South Africa issued the *Kairos Document*:

Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crises in South Africa (1985). They criticized state theology and church theology that called for reconciliation, non-violence, and justice but did not call for a removal of injustice and violence to facilitate the process of forgiveness. Prophetic theology resisted injustice and oppression and offered a meaningful way to deal with the *status confessionis* that existed in South Africa.

The goals of contextual theologies of liberation were to resist historical domination (Bethge and de Gruchy, 1976), the dehumanization of blacks (Boesak, 1977), and the system of apartheid (Mosala, 1989; Mosala and Buti Thlagale 1986; de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, 1983), to redress violence (Villa-Vicencio, 1987) and to make a commitment to fight for justice for all members of South African society. De Gruchy has also explored the role of Christianity in democratic rule. Jesse Mugambi (1994) and Villa-Vicencio (1992) have called for a theology of reconstruction. In Kenya, Jesse Mugambi's book, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, outlines a number of options for Christian churches in Africa while Villa-Vicencio's book by the same title critically analyzes nation building and demands of human rights. Steve de Gruchy in several programmatic essays has promoted economic and social development in light of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

Second, feminist theology has come of age with the work of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (Circle). The Circle is an initiative of Mercy Amba Oduyoye, who convened African women in 1989 in Ghana to form a critical theological community that takes gender, the experiences of women, and injustice as important starting points for theology. Oduyoye's book *Hearing and Knowing* (1986) set the stage and it was followed by the Circle's first book, *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*, edited by Oduyoye and Misimbi R.A. Kanyoro (1992). Members of the Circle employ a cultural hermeneutics to do a critical analysis of the histories and engagement of women in theological discourse. They have also pledged to fight HIV/AIDS which has disproportionately affected women in Africa. Oduyoye (2001) has argued that theology is a narrative because Members of the Circle explore texts and offer dialogical perspectives on gender issues in Africa. They also present critical perspectives on cultural practices that do not enhance the quality of life for Africans. Members of the Circle have addressed several issues, including the mythopoetic past that glorified the domination of women; they reject female genital cutting; condemn violence against women in all forms, and call attention to the economic and political marginalization of women in society, and the church.

Third, theologies of inculturation (including adoption, adaptation, and incarnation) deal with enrooting the church in African social, cultural, and religious realities (Idowu, 1965). Calls for inculturation are grounded in the view that African religious ideas should be incorporated into Christian theology and practice (Mulago, 1965). Mulago has argued that introducing African religious and cultural ideas "must be assimilation, an incarnation, but above all liberation, an elevation, a transfiguration, a supernaturalisation, a new way of being, a seizure in and by Christ, in and by the Church." Emphasis on African culture is important because Christianity has to be rooted in African culture. Inculturation goes beyond the three selves: self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting, first articulated by Henry Venn to the inclusion of

the cultural, religious, and philosophical thought forms of Africans. Laurenti Magesa (2004) has argued that the Hebrew and Christian traditions have always borrowed and adapted ideas from other cultures. Inculturation is sacred because it is the reawakening of African consciousness, identity, and the reawakening of ecclesial communities where the place and the role of women take center stage. This invites an intellectual dialogue and a liturgical practice relevant to the African ideas as well as the development of ethical perspectives consistent with African values.

Fourth, narrative theology has found a home in Africa through the work of Joseph Healey and Donald Syberts in *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (1996) which draws from biblical and African wisdom. Healey and Syberts have studied proverbs, sayings, riddles, stories, plays, myths, and songs to carry on a theological reflection on themes that emerge from them. For example, death is a transition into the next world; the church is an extended family where Christ is a brother and ancestor. God is parent, and both are in union with the power of the Spirit. They discuss proverbs that address hospitality and argue that stories about sharing a meal in the African context reflect the Eucharist as well as a guest Christology. There is also a theology of welcoming and a theology of love. African narratives also offer a pastoral theology that unites divine, human, and church culture.

Fifth, a theology of health is emerging in light of the major health issues of the twentieth century. While healing was very instrumental in the founding of the AICs the theologians turned to health and healing only recently. The HIV and AIDS pandemic challenges the church to respond with compassion. An effective strategy includes training pastoral leadership that is informed of the dangers of HIV/AIDS. James Cochrane has called for a new approach to health that takes into consideration health worlds, not only one specific illness. Bongmba using the theological motif of the image of God has called on the church in Africa and the international community to fight the pandemic through prevention campaigns and advocacy for treatment (Bongmba, 2007). The Circle of Concerned Women Theologians of Africa has focused on HIV/AIDS because it affects women disproportionately.

Sixth, the ecotheological enterprise in Africa has joined a global conversation that has taken place over the last thirty-five years.²³ As a theological project, it seeks to address environmental degradation from a Christian perspective. As with most contextual approaches to theology, an ecological theology offers a critical perspective on process and practices that have brought about the environmental crisis while at the same time drawing insights from ecology to analyze Christian practice. In the African context, Marthinus L. Daneel, in two volumes, titled *Earthkeepers* (1998, 1999), has discussed the ecological theological praxis of African Initiated Churches in Zimbabwe and Ernst Conradie has published extensively on the subject. Daneel's work comes out of a participant observation in Zimbabwe, and Conradie's work comes out of a larger interest in ecology and biodiversity in a conversation with other scholars around the globe.

Environmental theology is justified on several grounds. First, the creation narratives invite readers of the Bible to carry out their stewardship and care for the created order. Humanity has a responsibility to care for the earth, rather than trash and destroy the earth (Bakken and Bouma-Prediger, 2000:83).²⁴ Conradie distinguishes between

ecothology and environmental ethics, arguing that addressing the environmental crisis invites theological reflection on many areas of the theological enterprise.²⁵

Ecological theology certainly requires a reinvestigation of Christian doctrine too. It cannot be narrowly focused on a reinterpretation of creation theology but calls for a review of all aspects of the Christian faith, including the trinity, God as Father, creation, humanity, sin, providence, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, the church, the sacraments and Christian hope.²⁶

Ecotheology highlights a growing crisis that will engulf all humanity and that religious communities cannot afford to ignore. In addition to deforestation, African communities face deterioration of the landscape as urban and increasingly rural areas are being subjected to pollution, and the depletion of water resources. Conradie has argued that an appropriate theological metaphor to call attention to the devastation is to see the created order as household of God (*oikos*).²⁷ African communities need systematic education and sensitization on making changes in ways of life and current agricultural patterns that contribute to environmental degradation. For example in the Donga Mantung area of the Northwest Province of Cameroon, many individuals have cultivated eucalyptus since the 1960s and there is a general understanding that the eucalyptus trees have contributed to the loss of water resources in the area. An aggressive education could change prevailing ideas about the environment and open dialogue with political leaders who could think of alternative energy and building materials for regions like the Donga Mantung area.

Theologians could contribute to a better environment by speaking out in favor of basic practices like recycling, reducing electricity consumption, conservation of water, and reduced use of fuel products. Earth keeping practices have emerged in South Africa since 1994.

Marthinus L. Daneel has published on earth keeping ministries and liturgies of some AIC in Zimbabwe for several years.²⁸ In South Africa, the Network of Christian Communities (NECCSA) promotes earth keeping practices. Other groups exist in Nigeria and Kenya where the work of the Greenbelt Movement has brought international attention. The churches use green rituals and liturgies, which promote tree planting and mark a new spirituality, a sense of mission. Daneel incorporates tree planting in his understanding of the Eucharist and a Christological reading of the healing ministry of the Church. He argues: "Environmental abuse is sinful. It causes Christ to suffer and Mwari [the High God] to judge, in retaliation, through drought. By its very nature the church in this context is or should be both protector and healer of the environment, ministering by implication to the wounded body of Christ" (1999). There are differences of interpretation but the churches work with an ecumenical spirit that involves traditional healers, chiefs, spirit-mediums, and other authorities. Tree planting ceremonies demonstrate the conviction that Christ is the guardian of the land (*muridzi venyika*) and the believer's task is not *dominium terrae* but healing and restoration because the earth is part of Christ's body. The emerging theological reorientation rethinks the creation story, seeing Adam as caretaker, God as the tree planter, humanity as equals with nature and not rulers. Furthermore, God's kingdom exists in nature, God lives in trees,

destruction of nature is sin, and the church is called to restore the land. Daneel has argued that theologically earth-keeping ministries recognize local beliefs that Mwari the Creator is an insider. Christ is the earth keeper, planting trees recognizes the place of Christ as earth keeper, and the Spirit is the spirit of creation and for that reason plays a crucial role in our understanding of the need to maintain a sustainable eco system. Earth keeping is a cleansing ritual, and exorcism. It is controversial but helpful because “the Spirit is believed to be the agent casting out environmental evil, sensitizing the conscience of all human beings as stewards of the earth . . .” (1999:236). As African churches think of the future, it is important that they develop a spiritual ethos that takes ecology seriously.

Seventh, Pentecostal theology is emerging as the fastest growing area of Christian thought in Africa. As an emerging theology the specifics could be gathered from the sermons and teachings of the pastors, and the music, films, testimonials, Bible lessons, and deliverance services. Pentecostal theology still focuses on the Spirit as an important starting point. The earliest theological ideas focused on the debate about the coming and indwelling presence of the Spirit *inhabitation Dei*. Pentecostals emphasized sanctification following the tradition of Wesley. One first received Christ and then was baptized by the Holy Spirit as a second act. Sanctification was considered a later act of grace bestowed by the spirit that dwells in the believer. The founder of the movement in the U.S., William Seymour argued that the dwelling of the Spirit in the life of the believer was the habitation of God.

The Lord has mercy on him for Christ's sake and puts eternal life in his soul, pardoning him of his sins, washing away his guilty pollution, and he stands before God justified as though he had never sinned . . . then there remains that old original sin . . . Jesus takes that soul that has eternal life in it and presents it to God for thorough cleansing and purging from all Adamic sin . . . Now he is on the alter for the fire of God to fall which is the baptism with the Holy Ghost. It is the free gift upon the sanctified, cleansed heart.²⁹

Early Pentecostal theology was lived theology that emphasized ideas similar to the Wesleyan quadrilateral: scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. The Bible provided the bedrock for the emerging theology. African Pentecostal theology is emerging in different congregations and I will use the example of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) to sketch this emerging theology. Their beliefs, *Our Fundamental Beliefs in the Bible*, have been posted on the Church's website. The Church is an organic community constituted to spread the word of God around the world and subscribes to forty-two creeds that state church doctrines, church life, and beliefs on Christian practice. This document has been adapted for a manual of baptism for new members.

In addition to these statements, the teachings of the General Overseer, Pastor Enoch A. Adeboye are also important sources for the practices of the church.³⁰ A central component of church life has been the idea that members and leaders of the church should follow the example of G.O. Adeboye. This is expressed in the maxim, “Follow Your Leader.” While the example of Adeboye has been followed, he has been described by many as a humble individual.

Members of the RCCG believe that the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit and contains the revealed will of God. The next statements address the Godhead, God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit. On God and Jesus, the statement follows much of the Protestant traditions, but on the Holy Spirit, the statement indicates:

The Holy Spirit is the third Person in the TRINITY. He has the same power, the same glory with God the Father and God the Son—John 14:16–17; John 15:26; Acts 13:24. He is one with the Father and the Son who is to be worshiped and served. Three Persons that become one are the source of blessings to all the living creatures in Heaven and earth—Matt. 28:19; II Cor.13:14; I John 1:5–7. The Holy Spirit has a great work to perform. He teaches, He speaks to [people], and bears witness in us—Acts 16:6–7; He performs the work of regeneration for man—John 3:5–6; He also performs the work of Sanctification I the born again souls until they are fully sanctified—John 16:8; Eph. 1:17–19, II Thess. 2:13; I Cor. 12:7; He empowers one in the Lord, Acts 1:8.

Faith, Wealth, and Prosperity

In addition to the focus on the Holy Spirit, healing, faith, wealth, and prosperity are important aspects of Pentecostal theology. The RCCG and Pentecostal churches in Africa today communicate a faith gospel, which holds that Christians should not be poor because they are God's children. The emphasis on wealth and prosperity in Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches in Africa is grounded on the idea that faith in Jesus changes one's life and that a person thrives spiritually and materially. This situational theology has grown to meet the needs of believers in a context of economic crisis.³¹ Adeboye emphasized money because of his concern about the welfare of the people. He then devised a plan to teach biblical principles of giving arguing that, as people responded to the messages and gave to the church, the Lord blessed them, and poverty would no longer be the major problem for the church.³²

Adeboye has stressed material success and wellbeing, healthy living and salvation of the soul because Jesus did not come only for the poor.³³ Using himself as an example, Adeboye has stated:

And the Lord said, they will listen to me, knowing that, at least, I have a Ph.D. in mathematics. They will also listen to me because they know that fools do not get a Ph.D. in mathematics. The main aim of Christ the Redeemer's Friends Universal is to make a forum available to the people who are high in society to mix together in the love of God.³⁴

He has argued (quite correctly) that the greatest darkness in any nation is with those in leadership. The RCCG has succeeded financially and built a mega International Headquarters outside Lagos and is building its North American Headquarters in Floyd, Hunt County, Texas.

The change from the God of the poor, to the God of the rich, marks a drastic shift in strategy as well as biblical understanding of wealth and poverty. What makes it even more difficult to understand is the fact that if one is poor, then such a person is not a

friend of God. According to this perspective, one can no longer wonder what is going on when there is poverty. "Poverty is evil as well as a curse which brings hatred and destruction in its wake."³⁵ Once prosperity was established as a blessing and will of God, the elaboration of that teaching was limitless. Jesus came to earth to take away all curses, and one of those curses is poverty. In a different sermon on heaven, Adeboye stated, "I am not going to die poor. You can be the richest man in this world and still get to Heaven, if you are holy. You can be the poorest man in this world, if you do not live holy, and not born again, you will be the chairperson in Hell."³⁶

The devil does not want Christians to be witnesses to other people about the work of Jesus. In plain language, if you are poor, you cannot witness to a rich person because that rich person is going to think that you are only interested in his or her wealth. If you talk to the poor, that poor individual will ask you why God has not supplied all your needs. Poverty will hinder you from preaching even to your family. If you are rich, they will delay a meeting because they are waiting for you to come, but if you are poor, regardless of the fact that you may be the oldest in the family, a meeting will proceed even if you are not present. One has to give tithes and offerings to the church. Citing Malachi 3:10, Adeboye and other leaders have argued that when one tithes, God blesses that individual abundantly.

Tithing is important because it reflects the law of nature. If you sow, you will reap. If you give, you will receive in abundance.³⁷ Adeboye has articulated the principle of giving in a transactional manner, especially making it clear that one of the perspectives to consider is that "nothing goes for nothing." One gets the impression that the Christian is in competition with God because Adeboye has also argued that one must go beyond giving tithes and offerings and try to do something special to compel God to bless more than what God would have done. The laws that work in this financial competition are set as follows. First, there is the law of harvest, you reap what you sow. Second, the law of unlimited returns means that those who tithe will receive an abundant return for the investment they have made. Third, the law of total returns means that you give all; God will give you all that you have invested. Finally, the law of diligence states that if you want God to place you in a position of lending to others, you will have to do what God tells you to do.

Two Examples of Doctrinal Development in African Theology

First, Christology has been a major focus of theology. This is a tradition that goes back to the first five centuries when debates on Christology led to the formulation of the Nicean and other creeds. Contemporary African theologians have turned to local images to understand Jesus. A. Sawyerr describes Jesus as an elder Brother, drawing from the Pauline motif that Jesus is the first-born and head of the family, the church. Several theologians have called Jesus an ancestor. E.J. Pénoukou, has described Jesus as *Jete*-ancestor who as an African ancestor provides the power and resources necessary for living life in community. Charles Nyamiti conceptualizes Christ as ancestor through kinship relations and the philosophical category of vitalism. Christ as ancestor is the sustaining force behind human fecundity, wisdom, sacred powers, individual and

communal responsibility, and interpersonal relationship. Bénédet Bujo calls Christ a proto-ancestor through a theology that stresses a “commemorative narrative soteriology” that links the community, and the dead. Christ as ancestor gives life to all. As one who has lived a good life and is now with God, Christ as ancestor inspires ethical engagement in the community. Since Christ is an ancestor, church leadership should follow the example of Christ and the church ought to reconsider celibacy because it does not fit the African context of family life. Uchenna A. Ezech argued that Christology is an area where theology in Africa could open a new space of discourse.³⁸ Diane Stinton (2004) in *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology*, discusses contemporary christologies in Africa from the perspectives of inculturation and liberation. She highlights some titles which Africans have used for Jesus, such as healer, ancestor, mediator, and family member. Many Africans continue to see Jesus as a leader that they can look up to because they consider Jesus plays a role that kings, chiefs, and other leaders in Africa filled. Stinton also raises questions about some of the categories used to describe Jesus, wondering if such titles do work even in the African context.

Second, another doctrinal development is John Mbiti's study on *New Testament Eschatology* (1977) in which he explored the theology of the Africa Inland Mission in Akamba society. Mbiti's central claim was that missionaries in the Akamba area taught a future eschatology that did not take into consideration Akamba ideals. Therefore, Christian practice focused in individual holiness. Mbiti compared Akamba and New Testament eschatological beliefs and sacrifices and claimed that the Akamba ceremonies lacked a reference to God and focus on Christ. Mbiti claimed that the Christian ceremonies were not only serious events, but also the only true ones. African religions were authentic religions on their own terms but these religions lacked any prospect for future life found in Christian eschatology. The book became controversial because Mbiti claimed that the Akamba have no concept of the future because they think of a brief present and a long past.

Challenges for the Future

Theology in Africa today offers a number of areas for further and more rigorous exploration. While some of these areas are already receiving attention, it is important to stress that further research and research in this area would make a significant contribution to the ecclesial community in Africa. The areas where theologians need to focus include a praxis-oriented reflection on poverty, disease, and illness, taking into consideration the growing and high infant mortality rates, as well as maternal deaths that remain alarming high on the continent. While there is on-going theological reflection on HIV and AIDS, the lessons learned from this area could be used to develop a theology of illness and health that could take the needs of the continent seriously.

It is important to address the growing violence on the continent. This includes domestic violence, police and state brutality, as well as war and ongoing crimes against people. Some of these issues can also be addressed in further research on political theologies that explore the idea of nationhood, leadership, and the challenges posed to society and its people like bribery, and political corruption in all its forms. Theologians

and their communities could also inquire about the nature of the “other” in the African context where *ubuntu* is increasingly appealed to as an ethical ideal. The most dangerous thing that is emerging here is the stand of the church on same sex relations that is out of touch with the ethical teachings of love. Finally, gender and ecological theologies remain crucial dimensions of the faith and ecclesial practice in Africa.

Notes

- 1 Essay draws from Elias K. Bongmba “African theology” in *Encyclopedia of African Thought*, edited by F. Abiola Irele and Biodun Jeyifo. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Elias K. Bongmba, “African Theology and the Question of Rationality,” in *Inculturation and Postcolonial Discourse in African Theology*, edited by Edward P. Antonio (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 241–66.
- 2 V.Y. Mudimbe, *Parables and Fables: Exegesis, Textuality, and Politics in Central Africa*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p. 33.
- 3 Molyneux, p. 101.
- 4 Mudimbe, p. 66.
- 5 James R. Cochrane. *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).
- 6 P. 120, 124–125.
- 7 P. 127.
- 8 Cochrane, 1999, p. 128.
- 9 P. 2, 3, 7.
- 10 P. 15, p. 144.
- 11 Mika Vähäkangas, *In Search of Foundations for African Catholicism: Charles Nyamiti's Theological Method*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), p. 2.
- 12 Vähäkangas, p. 87.
- 13 P. 97.
- 14 Friedrich Schleiermacher. *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, Trans. with introductions and notes by Terrence N. Tice. (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1966), p. 19.
- 15 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 54–55.
- 16 Pieter J.J. Botha, “Theology after Babel: Pluralism and Religious Discourse” in *The Relevance of Theology for the 1990s*. Edited by J. Mouton and B.C. Lategan. (Pretoria, South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council, 1994), p. 42.
- 17 This phrase was first used in African studies by Johannes Fabian in his *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
- 18 Elias Bongmba, “Eschatology: Levinasian Hints in a Preface,” *SEMEIA* 43 (Society for Biblical Literature Publication, 2003), 75–90.
- 19 Levinas, p. 160.
- 20 P. 163.
- 21 See Edith Wyschogrod, “Interview with Emmanuel Levinas,” *Philosophy and Theology*, 4 (1989).
- 22 John S. Mbiti. *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*. (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 22.

- 23 Some works on theology and environment include: W. S. Vorster, ed. *Are we Killing God's Earth?* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1987); J.N.K. Mugambi and M. Vähäkangas, eds. *Christian Theology and Environmental Responsibility* (Nairobi: Acton, 2001); E.M. Conradie, *Hope for the Earth-Vistas on a New Century* (Bellville: University of the Western Cape, 2000); E.M. Conradie, *Ecological Theology: A Guide for Further Research*, (Study Guides in Religion and Theology, 5 (Bellville: University of the Western Cape, 2001); E.M. Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); E.M. Conradie and D.N. Field, *A Rainbow over the Land: South African Guide for the Church and Environmental Justice*. (Cape Town: Western Cape Provincial Council of Churches, 2000); Daneel, M.L. *African Earthkeepers*. I. *Interfaith Mission in Earth-care* (African Initiatives in Christian Mission, 2; Pretoria: Unisa, 1998).
- 24 P. Bakken and S. Bouma-Prediger, eds. *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology and Ethics*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). See also S. Bouma-Prediger, *The Greening of Theology: The Ecological Models of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Joseph Sittler, and Jürgen Moltman*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).
- 25 Ernst Conradie, "Reformed Perspectives from the South African context on an Agenda for Ecological Theology." in *Ecotheology* 10:3 (2005) 281–343, edited by Ernst M. Conradie.
- 26 Ernst Conradie, 2005, p. 282–283.
- 27 Ernst Conradie, 2005, p. 285.
- 28 Marthinus L. Daneel, 1999.
- 29 William Seymour, "The Way into the Holiest." *The Apostolic Faith* I, no 2 (October 1906), p. 4. Cited in David Machina.
- 30 Moses A. Adekola. "The Redeemed Christian Church of God: A Study of an Indigenous Pentecostal Church in Nigeria." Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Nigeria, 1989.
- 31 Asonzeh F.K. Ukah. *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power: A Study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria*. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2008), p. 184.
- 32 RCCG. *Fundamentals of Belief in the Bible* (FBB), article 13.
- 33 Asonzeh F. K. Ukah, 2008, p. 185.
- 34 Pastor Adeboye. *The New Vision*. (Lagos: CRFU, 1990).
- 35 FBB, p. 6.
- 36 FBB, p.
- 37 This is an abbreviated discussion found in Asonzeh. See Asonzeh F.K. Ukah, 2008, p. 189. See Enoch Adeboye. *How to Turn your Austerity to Prosperity*. (Lagos, Nigeria: The CRM, 1989).
- 38 Uchenna A. Ezech. *Jesus Christ the Ancestor: An African Contextual Christology in the Light of the Major Dogmatic Christological Definitions of the Church from the Council of Nicaea (325) to Chalcedon (451)*. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003).

CHAPTER 17

The Church and Women in Africa

Isabel Apawo Phiri

Introduction

The institution of the Church in its diversity was brought to Africa through the missionary enterprise, but African theologians have been calling for the Church to be rooted in the African culture.¹ African women theologians are concerned about what it means for African women to rethink what it means to be church, to define what the new church should look like. African women theologians are using gender as a tool to assess the implications of having an indigenous African church. African women's discourse has pointed out that the coming of Christianity to Africa brought mixed blessings for African women. At one level, women embraced Christianity in large numbers because of the promised new life (new freedom) through Jesus Christ from some elements of cultural oppression.² Women who suffered from the oppression of African patriarchal structures in the home and society found a new identity of self-worth and dignity in the Church, which was not found within their own cultural context. However, African women theologians are also aware that African women lost the leadership roles that they had in African religion when they converted to Christianity. Therefore, it is the argument of this chapter that Christianity transferred religious leadership power which was shared between men and women in African religion to be the preserve of men only,³ who have guarded this power to exclude women from meaningful participation in church leadership in most of the African churches. As a woman theologian in Africa from a Presbyterian church tradition, who has struggled with the Church for over a decade,⁴ I want to focus on theology because I believe that at the heart of the struggles that women experience in the Church in Africa, there remains an inadequate theological framework for recognizing and celebrating the inherent giftedness, dignity, and equality which women possess.

Thus, using gender as a tool of analysis, and taking a historical and theological approach, a survey of the literature on women and the Church in Africa reveal five

broad categories: first, the Mission Churches' position on African women. Second, the role of missionary women in providing African women with role models of women's participation in the Church. Third, African women's experiences of being Church, which has been sub-categorized as follows: a) the ordination of women; b) women and theological education; c) spouses of ministers; e) African Church women organizations and f) African women's founded churches.

The Mission Churches' Position on African Women

A study of the mission policies in Africa reveals missionaries did not have a uniform policy on the role of African women in the Church, however, Catholic Mission Churches in any part of Africa refused to ordain women to priesthood as a matter of church policy on the participation of women in the Church. The theology of Catholic Churches that emphasizes the priest images God and Jesus Christ means that for Catholicism the maleness of a priest is not just symbolic or incidental but core to the theological imaging of God as male. Thus, if God who was incarnated in Jesus is male, goes the argument, only males can be priests. Unfortunately this argument does not go further to argue that since Jesus was also a Jew, then only Jews can become priests. The other argument given against women's leadership is perceived women's ritual impurity.

The Protestant missionary agencies and churches that rejected the ordination of African women based their decisions on conservative theology on the humanity of women as held by their mother churches. The basic argument was that the Bible commands all women to keep quiet in the churches. Therefore women can not preach in a congregation where men are present. For example, this is the theology followed by the Southern Baptist Mission Board. Despite this policy, the research of Rachel NyaGondwe Fielder has shown that Baptist women in Southern Malawi have acted against the flow to become pastors of churches within the Baptist Convention in Malawi.⁵

While some sending missions have shifted their position and have been ordaining women for decades, even though women themselves had to struggle for years to argue theologically for their ordination, they did not extend it to African women in the mission field. The reasons given were that women had a very low position in the African culture. Therefore the missionaries were just following the African cultural practices and beliefs towards women. Klaus Fiedler had made a valid observation when he argued:

This argument is not convincing, merely because it is often repeated and widely accepted, there are a number of arguments and observations which indicate this notion. The missionaries, if they felt it to be necessary, did not budge even from all-out conflict- for example, in the case of polygamy. Why should they shrink from confronting African culture on such a matter as women's position in the Church? The other observation is more important: there is no evidence even in those areas of Africa where women have a much higher position in society, such as among the Baulé in the area of the Mission Biblique en Côte d'Ivoire. The reason is not African culture but missionary subculture"⁶

Thus the theology used against African women raises questions of what it means for women to be human and be part of the church of the Triune God. As will be shown below, the relationship between women missionaries and African women was different.

“Real Missionaries are Ordained Men”: Female Missionaries and African Women

The missionaries who came to Africa did not have the same definition of a missionary. In some missions only ordained men qualified as missionaries. Gustav Warneck, the leading missiologist of the German classical missions, is quoted by Klaus Fiedler to have said that:

Women are valuable in missionary work, but their position must clearly be inferior. They are not to preach, because to do so would be ‘unhealthy and contrary to scriptures’. The role of a woman is either to be a missionary’s wife or to be a ‘third class’ missionary assistant. First and second class missionary assistants are crafts men and doctors. Real missionaries are ordained men.⁷

The real issue here was a theological one. The missionaries who came from a Calvinist background and conservative evangelical Pentecostal churches believed that in God’s perfect will mission work was for men. When a man could not be found to be sent to the mission field, God permitted the sending of women missionaries. Once the women established churches and either died or retired, they were always replaced by men. In the case of the Mission Churches that came from the Holiness movement, they believed that God sent men and women as missionaries in their own right. Married women and single women could be missionaries. Some of these women were responsible for planting churches in Africa through preaching and evangelism.

Christina Landman tells the story of the formation of the Women Missionary Society in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa 1890, who “sent 66 women missionaries to Nigeria, Zambia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe in the first 39 years of the society’s existence.”⁸ The women raised their own funds to send women missionaries. The only women who benefited from these funds were the single women who were sent out as missionaries. Unfortunately, even in the women-founded mission societies, women missionaries received a lesser stipend than male missionaries received. Thus even women internalized their own oppression and perpetuated it through an all-women society. Such actions were still being guided by a patriarchal theology that said women were inherently inferior to men.

In line with Christina Landman’s discussion, Klaus Fiedler has pointed out that in the English speaking missions, women formed their own societies as a protest against the mission bodies that only considered men as missionaries. He gives the example of Mrs Doremus who started the Women’s Union Missionary Society in 1861.⁹

Furthermore, of special interest to this chapter is the book edited by Dana L. Robert, *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers: Missionary Women In The Twentieth Century*. The essays in this volume examine the role of female missionaries around the world and throughout the decades of twentieth-century Christian history. It also assesses the role of women in missionary movements in both Protestant and Catholic denominations. It raises a crucial question for this chapter when it asks whether Christian missions have raised or lowered the status of women in Africa. As the reflections of African women theologians will show below, the response is in the affirmative.

Nyambura Njoroge, in *Kiama Kia Ngo: An African Christian Feminist Ethic of Resistance and Transformation* has shown how the Presbyterian missionary women and African women worked together in Kenya to resist female circumcision.¹⁰ Njoroge argues that the idea of sending women as missionaries or spouses was not a problem for the Church of Scotland because “the presence of women missionaries and spouses contributed greatly to the conversion of Gikuyu women to Christianity.”¹¹ I argue in *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy: Religious Experience of Chewa Women in Central Malawi* (1997) that this was also reported of the women missionaries and spouses who worked in the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian. Research by women theologians today indicates that the relationship between the women missionaries and African women was basically positive. The introduction of Bible study groups, which were followed by evangelistic home visitations, the introduction of basic classes where issues of hygiene and western home care lessons were given, the establishment and the running of boarding schools for African girls, are some of the activities that fostered partnership between female missionaries and African women.

It has been argued that the existence of racism in the societies where the missionaries come from was also transferred into the mission field. NyaGondwe Fielder argues that at the time when the Baptist missionaries came to Malawi, there was a general understanding that “white people were a superior race and were to be obeyed without question.”¹² Thus, the relationship between female missionaries and African women was of a superior and an inferior. Christina Landman indicates that racism and sexism existed in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa and affected the relationship between female missionaries and African women. There were exceptions: two white women deliberately chose to work in the black and colored communities where they made efforts to fight against racism and sexism.¹³ Theologically, most missions were comfortable with limitations to women’s leadership to women’s ministry on grounds that it is wrong for women to have authority over men, therefore women cannot preach to men but only to other women. The dedication of the women missionaries to work among African women, and what African women did with the new knowledge that they acquired will be the subject of the next section.

The Agency of African Women as the Church

The discussion in this section will be divided into five sections: a) the ordination of women; b) women and theological education; c) spouses of ministers; e) African Church women organizations and women as founders of churches.

The Ordination of Women

Stories of African women in the Church have shown long histories of struggle for ordination. This is highlighted in the 1991 outstanding publication: *Women Hold Up Half the Sky: Women in the Church of Southern Africa*, co-edited by Denise Ackermann, Jonathan A. Draper, and Emma Mashinini. This book was written before the Anglican

Church in Southern Africa started ordaining women. It records the struggles of men and women in the debates that the Church had as the Church grappled with the place of women in Church and society. Its focus is on the correct place of women in the ministry and leadership of the Church. The issue of the ordination of women dominated the discussions. The shortcoming of this book is that it concentrated on one denomination, the Anglican Church, and in only one country, South Africa. As it was written in 1991, the book does not cover, for example, the ordination of women that started a year after its publication.

The publication of *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*, edited by Isabel A. Phiri, D. Betty Govinden, and Sarojini Nadar in 2003, covered the concerns which were missing in the first book in that the contributors and the stories shared reflect the diversity of women's experiences from different denominations. At the same time the book avoids homogenizing the African woman by allowing each unique experience to come out. As observed by the editors of this book,

although there are vastly different experiences dictated by ethnicity, gender, class and Church traditions, in many respects, the stories are, predictably, similar. All the women are claiming the Bible in the context of Africa, and reminding the Church of Biblical tenets on which they have been nurtured. They tell their stories with great passion for the deep commitment to their faith. What shines through all these stories is an undeniable and unmistakable faith in the gospel. Through their energetic and resilient faith and spirituality they imbue Christianity in Africa with a form and character that is indeed worth recognizing.¹⁴

This book therefore celebrates the diversity of experiences of African women as they seek ordination. While an example is given of a woman's struggle for ordination in the United Congregational Church in Southern Africa, that took over a span of five decades, this struggle was not in vain as she received ordination during her life time.¹⁵ The purpose of telling the story is to highlight the amount of energy women need to fight against patriarchy in the Church. At the same time, other stories in the same book show the stories of two Indian South Africans in the Anglican Church and in a Pentecostal Church whose ministries in their churches were recognized and appreciated.

The publication of *On Being Church: African Women's Voices and Visions*, edited by Isabel Phiri and Sarojini Nadar in 2005, highlighted the title of this chapter, that although there has been significant change in the ordination of women in the Church in Africa, when one looks at the struggles of the majority of ordained women who contributed articles to this book, one feels that not much has changed. Ordained women are still struggling for recognition as ministers in the Church in Africa. In this book, ordained women felt that they were spending too much time fighting for survival instead of doing what God called them to do in the Church. Yet such struggles made them realize that their advocacy role in the patriarchal Church needed to continue.¹⁶

African Women and Theological Education

The role of women in the Church is also connected to women's access to theological education. As has been argued elsewhere,¹⁷ challenges that are linked to the enrolment

of African women to study theology include the following: (a) there are still few women in theological education in Africa because the initial missionaries who came to Africa linked the study of theology with the ordained ministry. Although the Mission Churches became autonomous from their mission heritage, they continued with the policy of linking theological education to the ordained ministry. By so-doing, up to the present, theological education is out of reach for the majority of African women. (b) In line with point (a), some Churches have allowed the enrolment of a few women in theological education for work among women. The painful part for women is that the men and women who enrol for theological education study the same content but in some cases receive different qualifications, while in others they get the same qualification but are assigned to different positions in the Church. Women are made to work under the leadership of their male classmates. (c) There are a few women who study theology for the ordained ministry. While some Churches have accepted the ordination of women, they nevertheless sponsor very few women to study theology. (d) Compared to enrolment of women in seminaries, there are many lay women in theological education, studying through theological education by extension or theological departments/schools in state universities. The majority of these women are not recognized in their Churches as they were not sent by the Church to study theology. (e) Many women who want to study theology through state universities and may have the approval of their Churches nevertheless fail to meet the entrance qualifications because they did not receive a full school education. This is connected to the cultural perception that when families do not have enough money to educate all their children, priority is given to the boy children because they will grow up to be breadwinners while girl children will be married off to men who will support them. (f) There are those women who do not want to study theology because they are not sure of employment opportunities outside the Church as many people still have the perception that theology is for ordination only. (g) Scholarships too have an age limit, which works against many African women who postpone their studies until later in life so that they can first have children and raise their families. By the time they plan to go back to further their theological studies, they have already passed the qualifying age for funding. Thus, although they are able to secure a place for further studies in theology, they are deemed too old to qualify for a scholarship. (h) While a donor may have a policy to grant a certain percentage of the scholarships to women, experience in Africa has shown that the biggest problem is to get the approval of the Church leaders to endorse the application form of a woman who wants to study theology but was not sent by her Church. In this way, theological education still remains the sole privilege of only those who have been chosen by the Churches to study theology. Yet, theological education must be for the whole people of God. While some funding institutions have recognized the receiving institution as the only authority to endorse a student's application for scholarship, this has been the exception and not the rule with most funding agencies.

In relation to the recruitment of women on the staff of theological institutions, (a) there are more theological institutions in Africa that have no women on its staff than those that recruit women. (b) Among the few women who are recruited to teach in theological institutions in Africa, the majority are teaching non-theological subjects. This means that a few lay/ordained women teach theological subjects. (c) The majority

of lay women from university theological schools/departments who are invited to teach theological subjects are either on a part-time basis or on limited term contracts. The disadvantage of not being on permanent employment is that one does not qualify to go on sabbatical leave so that one can concentrate on research and publication. Without publications, a staff member will not progress academically.

It is within this scenario that African women theologians who are in theological education see their role as educators of the church leadership and lay people about the ordained and lay ministry of women. They encourage many women to enrol in theological education even if their churches do not ordain women because theological education is not only for the ordained ministry but for the whole people of God. They play an advocacy role for the provision of good accommodation that is conducive to the process of learning for female theological students. They also play an advocacy role by connecting African women with funding agencies that are interested in promoting the theological education of African women.

African women theologians who are in theological education work with the theological institutions to promote the employment of African women as lecturers of theological disciplines in permanent positions. This has proved to be a very frustrating exercise if the head of the institution does not share the vision of women empowerment in theological institutions. African women theologians write about such experiences so that they can theologically reflect on what is going on and thereby gain collective wisdom from other sisters who may have gone through a similar experience and managed to overcome it. The Circle of Concerned Women Theologian's mentoring program works well not only in the context of student and staff relationship, but also among staff members. The experienced publishers pair up with the emerging scholars to transfer not only research and publishing skills, but also the entire programme of mentoring.

Spouses of Ministers

Being a spouse of a minister is considered as another opportunity for African women to serve in a leadership position in the Church in Africa. There are some women who view their marriage to a minister as a means to becoming a minister themselves through their husband. Stories are told of women who felt called by God to serve on a full-time basis in the Church, but could not do so because their churches do not accept women as ordained ministers. Instead they resorted to marrying men who promised to go to a theological institution and later become ordained ministers. Through this route the women also enter the theological institution to study theology even if it means getting an inferior type of theological education when compared to their husbands' studies. Once they complete their studies, they assist their husbands in writing their sermons and feel that they are serving God in the Church as spouses of ministers.¹⁸ This should be understood in the contexts where theological education is reserved for men because they will be ordained. Such churches, like the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of the Central Africa Presbyterian in Malawi, do not allow women to go for theological education at the same level with men. Being a wife of a future minister gives women

an opportunity to enrol at a theological institution even if the quality of education for wives of ministers is inferior.

There are other African women who believe that God has called them to be pastors' wives.¹⁹ Rachel NyaGondwe Fielder gives the testimonies from such women who see their marriage to a minister as a response to a call to full-time ministry. They take charge of their homes and the Church as full-time jobs that are combined.

Being a wife of a minister becomes a challenge to some African women when it becomes forced on them because a man has to go to a theological institution with a wife.²⁰ The assumption is that being married to a minister is an honor that no woman should refuse. God's will is abused to force such women to abandon their plans and interests in order to subject themselves to a forced marriage and job. Furthermore, some women who are married to a minister feel abused when they are forced to sacrifice their professions, because as minister's wives they are not allowed to work outside the Church.²¹ They are given responsibilities as leaders of church women organizations without appropriate training or gifts for the job. Other women have found it challenging when the Church does not pay them for the services that they offer to the Church. A wife's and children's allowance is offered in name only to reduce the tax on the minister's stipend, yet the money is given in full to the minister only.

It is because of such challenges and more that made the African women theologians conclude that:

In the new Church, theological education for Pastors' wives, although important should be the woman's choice. The power of the new model lies in women's right to choose whether that means formal Church ministry, or pursuance of a secular career. In other words, the model of the Church should not determine the career of the Pastor's wife. In this regards, the use of the term "Pastor's wife" should be reconsidered, as it can be extremely problematic and sexist. Indeed its uncritical use tends to deny a woman her own unique identity and makes her the property not only of the Pastor but that of the whole Church.²²

African Church Women Organizations

One of the features of the Church in Africa is the existence of very strong church women's organizations. The history of these organizations is linked to the work of the women missionaries.²³ It would not be far-fetched to call them the success story of the women missionaries in Africa. The question that has been asked by scholars is why church women's organizations have been so successful in the Church in Africa. There are many suggestions that have been advanced for their success. As argued elsewhere, to African women who are in the Church, these organizations "are a form of self expression, an opportunity to do something, but even more to be somebody. (They) give to women a feeling of belonging, within a male dominated church . . . in many ways it also provides scope for leadership talent to develop among women."²⁴

Through church women organizations, African women have carved a space for themselves that they can control within the male dominated churches. Through these

organizations, churches in Africa have expanded as a result of their evangelistic programs. They provide pastoral work for the needy within their churches and communities. They uphold strict Christian values for the church members and in their homes. They also nurture the young women in their faith. Apart from their spiritual contribution to the church, they are also known for their fund-raising abilities, which have kept many churches operational. They pay the salaries of their ministers, expand church infrastructures, and in some cases send women and men for theological education. A distinguishing feature of all the church women organizations in Africa is their uniform. Each uniform has meaning for their particular denomination. As observed by Haddad²⁵ and Phiri,²⁶ once the women wear their uniform it gives them a certain amount of power that grants them another level of leadership in the church.

The church leadership has viewed church women organizations with mixed feelings. The churches recognize their value for the life of the church but at the same time fear that they will become independent of the church structures. That is why in the case of the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, an elder is appointed to attend all the women's weekly meetings to a) control what they discuss and b) report their discussions to Session and the General Assembly. This is an example of the extent that patriarchy can go to control women in the church.

African women theologians have been critical with the way the African churchwomen organizations use their power. They feel that without realizing it, to some extent, these organizations promote patriarchy in their use of power and in their conservative ways of reading and interpreting the Bible. Yet, African women theologians have also come to the realization that the African churchwomen organizations provide a space where transformation in the Church can take place. Young women from these organizations should be encouraged to go and study life-affirming theology with the intention of coming back to their organization to lead Bible studies in a liberative way.

African Women as Founders of Churches

Another unique phenomenon of the Church in Africa is the existence of African Instituted Churches (AICs) and the new Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. As observed by Philomena Mwaura:

AICs are said to particularly to provide women with a chance to recover their traditional status and positions that had been undermined by the teachings of mission churches . . . AICs are also regarded as sites for women liberation. They have provided women with a forum where they find liberation from ever present fears of witchcraft and other forces that undermine their well being."²⁷

A special feature of the AICs is the space that they have created for women to be founders of churches and ministries. Mwaura has also argued that "the founding of churches by women in Africa is the ultimate act of religious independency and self-determination."²⁸ Examples of older AICs founded by women that have been well documented include: Kimpa Vita the founder of the Antonian movement;²⁹ Christiana

Abiodun-Akinsowon, co-founder of Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Nigeria;³⁰ Mother Mokotuli Christina Nku,³¹ the founder of the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission in Gauteng, South Africa; Mai Chaza,³² the founder of City of God movement (Guta ra Jehovah) in Zimbabwe; Alice Lenshina Mulenga,³³ the founder of the Lumpa Church; Grace Tani, co-founder of the Twelve Apostles in Ghana; and Marie Dahonon Lalou, founder of Déi'ma in Ivory Coast;³⁴ Gaudencia Aoko, founder of Maria Legio of Africa in Kenya.³⁵ From the 1970s there has been an increase in churches and ministries founded by women. These include: Mai Nyajere, founder of Chilobwe healing Centre in Malawi; Mai Chimpondeni of Namatapa healing ministries; Bishop Yami, co-founder of Blessed Hope Church;³⁶ Mai Nyajere founder of Chilobwe healing centre in Malawi;³⁷ Mrs Agnes Majeche, principal leader of the Zvokomborero Apostolic Faith Church;³⁸ and Rev. Margaret Wanjiru, founder of Jesus Alive Ministries, Kenya.³⁹ Unfortunately, as already observed in the case of female missionaries who founded churches, even in the case of the AICs, it is rare for leadership to be passed on from these women to another generation of women leaders. Often leadership is taken over by a man.

Why do Women Remain in the Church?

Despite the negative experiences of African women in the Church, the Church in Africa is predominantly female. The question that has been asked by Natalie Watson is: "If the picture of the church that has been painted is true why do women still go to church?"⁴⁰ Watson has identified two reasons worth repeating in this chapter because they echo the unspoken words of African women. These are: a) there is another side to the story of the Church, which women find meaningful. This has been shown in this chapter when we considered the contribution of female missionaries to the wellbeing of African women. We also noted the experiences of African women who have achieved ordination within the patriarchal structures of the church and those who, in their lay capacity, have contributed to the expansion of Christianity in Africa. b) Within the patriarchal structures of the church, women have carved spaces for themselves, which they feel are worth staying in the Church for. An example of this category is the African women church organizations and women who have founded their own churches. Therefore for the majority of church women in Africa who have decided to remain in the Church, Watson advises that our question should not be whether women should stay in the Church or leave because of patriarchy and clericalism in the church. Rather, women's concern should be finding transformed ways in which both men and women can feel that the Church affirms their humanity.

Towards a Liberative African Indigenous Church

African theologians, both men and women, have written extensively on what the Church in Africa should look like with the change of church ownership from missionaries to the local people. In the words of Kwame Bediako,⁴¹ Christianity is no longer a foreign religion in Africa. It has become an African religion. As warned by Tinyiko

Maluleke,⁴² although Christianity has become an African religion, we are still reminded of its foreignness in our midst in many ways. For African women in the Mission Churches, despite the churches changing from being mission controlled to African controlled, women's experiences have remained the same. African women were marginalized in the Mission Churches and they have continued to be marginalized in the churches that are being led by African people. This is because the patriarchy that came with the missionaries has been reinforced by the patriarchy in African culture and in the Bible. This triple oppression led to the marginalization of women even in those societies where women had religious leadership roles. African women theologians are saying that this does not need to be the case if our goal is to have a church that is deeply rooted in the African soil. African women theologians are constantly reminding African male theologians that we need to work together to envision an African indigenous church that affirms the humanity of both men and women as being Church.

At the October 2003 consultation of the African women theologians, which was held in Johannesburg, South Africa, African women reflected on how African women envisioned being or becoming Church in Africa today. What has been shared in this chapter are some of the ways in which women have experienced being Church. However, the women's reflections did not only dwell on how things are at the moment. They allowed themselves to dream about how they should be Church in a transformed way.

First the African women theologians affirmed the fact that the Church has to be rooted in African traditional religiosity bearing in mind that the pursuit of justice for men and women should be the guiding principle. Creating just relations in the Church requires a theology that acknowledges that Jesus Christ as the head of the Church taught about such just relationships in the new community he created.

Second, the new Church in Africa has to learn from African religion on how it affirms the leadership of women and men in its efforts to serve the community of faith. For this to happen, the African Church needs to change the missionary attitude of rejecting African religiosity. It must embrace that God revealed Godself to all people. In the African context, God revealed Godself to both men and women to carry out roles that affirmed life for the community. As described by Nasimiyu Wasike:

God's manifestations of knowledge, prophecy, gift of healing, working of miracles, and discerning of spirits can be revealed to the community through a woman or a man. It is an acknowledged reality that both women and men are 'worthy instruments through whom the divine communicates with humanity and people communicate with the divine.'⁴³

This understanding of God using both women and men in ministry is already there in the early Christian community. It is unfortunate that androcentric ways of reading the Bible has emphasized biblical passages that make women inferior to men at the expense of those verses that show the equality of women and men in religious leadership roles in the Church. It then becomes the responsibility of all theological institutions in Africa to train church leaders (lay and ordained) to have adequate theological knowledge about the liberative roles of men and women, which are biblically based and also affirmed by the African spirituality.

Third, African women's vision of being Church involves transformation of current conceptions of the use of power in the Church. It requires an affirmation that all power is accountable to God. God is the source of power. This power is shared with all God's people for the wellbeing of all humanity and creation. Thus, one should not use power to lord over others but to empower them to be what God intends them to be. The implications of this for women who are ordained is not to practice leadership like men but to use the resources that God has given them as women to nurture the people of God, knowing that God is the nurturer of humanity. Shared power in the church women organizations would mean embracing all women as being equal in God's sight. This would also mean doing away with the divisions among married women and single women, older women and younger women, women with children and those without as a basis for leadership within church women organizations. It would also mean doing away with male presence in the African women's organization through a male church representative at women's meetings as well as doing away with the forced leadership of minister's wives in church women's organizations. The servant leadership model of Jesus becomes a model on how power should be used in the Church.

Fourth, it would mean the transformation of the theological curriculum to make the content of theology and biblical studies empowering to the theological students alert to alternative ways of being Church that affirm the humanity and dignity of men and women.

Fifth, we need to use the model of the Trinity as the basis for the relationships in the Church. Working as a community is what Africa is good at and therefore can offer this model to the global church. As pointed out already, this is a liberative community of just relationships.

Finally, a new vision of being Church would require transformation of women's roles in African Instituted Churches, Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches in Africa. In this chapter, we have praised these churches as being better than Mission Churches in the roles given to African women. However, research has also shown that on the whole they hold conservative views that are very patriarchal when it comes to the interpretations of scriptures over women's roles in the homes and society. They tend to hold negative attitudes towards feminist interpretation of the Church. This is also true for the African church women organizations. One wants to see a liberative understanding of the humanity and dignity of women in all the branches of the body of Christ in Africa.

Notes

- 1 Laurent Mages and JNK Megabit, "Introduction" In J. K.L. Megabit and J Mages eds. *The Church in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1998), p. 2.
- 2 It was thought that more women than men converted to Christianity, prompting suspicion that something in Christianity appeals to women. See Dorothy L. Hodgson *The Church of Women: Gendered Encounters Between Maasai and Missionaries*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).
- 3 This assertion does not endorse patriarchy in African religious leadership, but underscores that the significant role women played within African traditional religion was lost with the coming of Christianity.

- 4 See Isabel A. Phiri "Marching, Suspended and Stoned: Christian Women in Malawi" in Kenneth R. Ross (ed.) *God, People and Power in Malawi: Democratization in Theological Perspective*. (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1996), pp. 63–105.
- 5 Rachel NyaGondwe Fiedler "Against the flow: Stories of women Pastors in the Baptist Convention in Malawi 1961–2001. In Isabel A. Phiri, D. Betty Govinden, and Sarojini Nadar, eds. *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*. (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster), pp. 183–84.
- 6 Klaus Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions*. (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1994), p. 292; Christina Landman, 2002, p. 163.
- 7 Klaus Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions*, p. 292.
- 8 Christina Landman, 2002, p. 163.
- 9 Klaus Fiedler, 1994, p. 292.
- 10 Nyambura J. Njoroge, 2000, pp. 11–34.
- 11 Nyambura J. Njoroge, 2000, p. 11.
- 12 Rachel NyaGondwe Fiedler, 2005, p. 182.
- 13 Christina Landman, 2002, p. 165.
- 14 "Introduction" In Isabel A. Phiri, D. Betty Govinden, and Sarojini Nadar, eds. *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*. (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2002), p. 2.
- 15 Isabel A. Phiri, "Called at Twenty Seven and Ordained at Seventy Three! The Story of Rev Victory Nomvete Mbanjwa in the United Congregational Church in Southern Africa". In Isabel A. Phiri, D. Betty Govinden, and Sarojini Nadar, eds, 2002:119–38.
- 16 See the following articles in the same book: Sarojini Near, "On Being Church: African Women's Voices and Visions"; Dorcas Olubanke Akitunde, "Partnership and the Exercise of Power in the Christ Apostolic Church, Nigeria"; Mary Tororeiy, "Voices from the Periphery: Being Church as Women in Church."
- 17 Isabel A. Phiri, "Major challenges for African women theologians in theological education (1989–2008)," in *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* December 2008, Vol. XXXIV, No. 2, pp. 63–81.
- 18 Isabel Phiri, 1997:118–19.
- 19 NyaGondwe Fiedler, 2005:175–76.
- 20 Isabel Phiri, 1997:117.
- 21 Nyagondwe Fieldler, 2005:176.
- 22 Sarojini Nadar, 2005:21.
- 23 Mia Brandel-Syrer, *Blackwomen in Search of God*, (London: Lutterworth, 1962); Phiri, 1997; Njoroge, 2000; Haddad, 2002; Esther Mombo, 2002; Dorcas, 2002.
- 24 Gerdien Verstraelen-Gilhuis. *From Dutch mission church to Reformed Church in Zambia: the scope for African leadership and initiative in the history of a Zambian mission church* (Gerdien Franeker, Netherlands: T. Wever, c1982), p. 253.
- 25 Beverley G. Haddad. "The Mothers' Union in South Africa: Untold Stories of Faith, Survival and Resistance." In Isabel A. Phiri, D. Betty Govinden, and Sarojini Nadar, eds. *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*. (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster), pp. 101–77.
- 26 Isabel A Phiri, 1997.
- 27 Philomena N. Maura, "Gender and Power in Africa Christianity: African Instituted Churches and Pentecostal Churches." In Kalu, O., ed. *African Christianity: An African Story* (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 2005), pp. 420–1.
- 28 Philomena Maura, 2005, p. 422.

- 29 Marthinus L. Daneel, *The Quest for Religious Belonging: Introduction to the Study of African Independent Churches*. (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987).
- 30 Isichei, Elizabeth Allo 1995.
- 31 See Thomas, Linda Elaine. *Under the Canopy: Ritual Process and Spiritual Resilience in South Africa*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1999).
- 32 Marthinus L. Daneel. 1987.
- 33 A. Roberts, *The Lumpa Church Of Alice Lenshina, In Protest And Power In Black Africa*, ed. RL Rotberg and A Mazurui. (New York, OUP, 1970).
- 34 Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women: A Modern History*, (Beth Gillian Raps: Westview Press, 1997).
- 35 Teresia Hinga, Teresia M. "Women, Power and Liberation in an African Church: A Theological Case Study of the Legio Maria Church in Kenya." Ph.D. Dissertation: Lancaster University, Lancaster, Great Britain, 1990.
- 36 Isabel A. Phiri, "African Women in Mission: Two Case Studies from Malawi." *Missionalia* 28/2–3, 2000, pp. 267–93.
- 37 Isabel A. Phiri, "The Church As A Healing Community: Women's Voices And Visions From Chilobwe Healing Centre." *Journal of Constructive Theology* Vol. 10, No. 1, July 2004, 13–28.
- 38 Lillian Dube-Chirairo. "Mission and Deliverance in the Zvikomborero Apostolic Faith Church." *Missionalia* 28/2–3, 2000, pp. 294–311.
- 39 Philomena Njeri Maura, 2002.
- 40 Natalie Watson, *Introducing Feminist Ecclesiology*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), p. 3.
- 41 Kwame Bediako. *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non Western Religion*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995).
- 42 Tinyiko Maluleke, "In Search of the True Character of African Christian Identity: A Review of the Theology of Kwame Bediako." *Missionalia*, 25 (2), 1997, 210–19.
- 43 Nasimiyu Wasike, 1997, p. 61.

CHAPTER 18

Feminist Theologies in Africa

Sarojini Nadar

Introduction

In 1997, while I was an Honours student in Hebrew Bible my teacher of Hebrew, at the University of Cape Town, Azila Reisenberger, invited me to a meeting at the home of Denise Ackermann. She told me that the group I was going to meet was called the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, and that the “Cape Town Circle” was one chapter of a number of chapters or groups of this growing women’s movement on the continent of Africa. “What do they do?” I asked with curiosity “They do feminist theology from the perspectives of African women,” she answered. “And how do they do this?” was my next question. “They do theology by beginning with their context and stories,” she answered and then urged me to attend the group meeting that night with the words “We are just telling our stories at the moment.”

And so began my journey with feminist theologies in Africa—with this little group of women from different faiths—Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, African traditionalists, and Christian, all focusing on what it meant to reflect on our context, identity and spirituality as feminist theologians. These reflections were ultimately published in a book called *Claiming Our Footprints: South African women reflect on context, identity and spirituality*, a book in which my attempt at writing my first article was published (see Nadar, 2000). It became clear to me that through this small group of women, who identified themselves with a continental-wide movement, feminist theology was being done in Africa. Hence, any attempt to consider the history and the development of feminist theologies in Africa must of necessity look to the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter the Circle) as a chief source of information and guidance on this oft-contested subject.

In this survey article on feminist theologies in Africa, I wish to reflect on three areas within this topic: 1) the history and development of feminist theologies in Africa; 2) the methods and features of African feminist theologies¹; and 3) the problems of and

possibilities for the future of feminist theologies in Africa. Before beginning, it is important to note two things. Firstly, while feminist theologies are by no means restricted to the religion of Christianity in Africa, I wish to restrict my discussion in this chapter to the development within Christianity, given that this is where my expertise and training lies. Secondly, while I situate these reflections within the body of work which has already attempted to document the contours of African women's theologies (Phiri, 1997; Oduyoye, 2001; Kanyoro, 2006; Landman, 1995), I will also attempt here to raise some critiques of the discourse and note some potential areas for future development.

The History and Development of Feminist Theologies in Africa

If one wants to know the history of feminist theologies in Africa one must look to the history of the Circle, which is well documented in recent writings (see for example Kanyoro, 2006). It deserves some attention here, in at least three areas of the history and development of feminist theologies in Africa: 1) its relationship to the history of the global feminist movement; 2) the necessity of formulating African women's theologies vis-à-vis African theology and its sub-disciplines; and 3) the distinctive face of African women's theologies vis-à-vis their feminist counterparts in other parts of the world.

Feminist Theologies in Africa and their Relationship to the Global Feminist Movement

The rise of the feminist movement has usually been described as having occurred in "three waves." The first wave focused on women's political rights—the suffrage movement of the early 1920s in the US, and its counterpart movements in other parts of the world—for example in the early 1930s when white women first obtained the right to vote in South Africa. The second wave focused more on women's civil rights in the domestic sphere, for example on issues of reproductive rights and household duties. The third wave is now commonly understood as the strand within feminism that recognizes that women are by no means a homogenous group and therefore any attempt at describing women's experiences (women's collective experiences being the chief cornerstone of feminist discourse) must essentially and inevitably consider that women's experiences are indeed varied and different and hence the slogan that "we are not all sisters under the skin" must be taken seriously. It is within this third wave of feminist discourse that African women's theologies find their expression most perceptibly. In other words, African women theologians have strived to carve a space for themselves which is both welcoming of, and takes seriously, their experiences from within varied African contexts—these experiences include among others, experiences of colonialism and apartheid (Dube, 2000), patriarchal oppression within culture (Kanyoro, 2002) the rise of the HIV pandemic particularly within the context of gender oppression (Phiri et al., 2003; Dube and Kanyoro, 2004) and the ever-increasing feminization of poverty (Haddad, 2000).

African Women's Theologies vis-à-vis African Theologies

In addition to the space which African women's theologies have carved for themselves within the global secular feminist movement, African women theologians have also sought to chart a separate space for themselves within the "irruption" (cf. Fabella and Torres, 1983) of varied liberation theologies into the classical western academy. One such liberation theology is what is now commonly known as African theologies, and these theologies are not only taught at theological institutions in Africa, but also the University of KwaZulu-Natal, for example, even boasts a chair in African Theologies.² African Theologies, which began as a protest theology against the demonizing tendencies of colonial and missionary interpretations of the religion and culture in Africa, has evolved into an authentic discipline and several scholars research and publish in the area of the intersection of African religion and cultures and Christianity. Scholars such as Setiloane (1980), Pobee (1978), Tutu (1979), and Mbiti (1979) were some of the first scholars to seriously engage and name this emerging theology in the 70s and 80s.

African Theologies further broke down into several theological sub-disciplines. Tinyiko Maluleke (1997:4–23) has argued that while the debates were on one level, between African theology and the classical theology of the west, there was also an "internal" debate going on too—this debate was about the differences between Black or Liberation Theologies and African Theologies—the proponents of the latter arguing that the cultures and experiences of the African people were not taken seriously by the former discourses. Hence, while they were keen to show the similarities between the discourses, they were also insistent on the differences. These debates were well captured in some of the titles of the papers and books which emerged, e.g. Josiah Young's 1986 work *Black and African Theologies: Siblings or Distant Cousins?*, Desmond Tutu's 1986 article *Black Theology and African Theology: Soulmates or Antagonists?* And Mokgethi Motlhabi's article *Black or African Theology? Toward an Integral African Theology*.

While the proponents of African Theologies may have felt appropriated rather than included by Liberation or Black Theologies, another group emerged, who also felt appropriated by African Theology itself. This group is made up of African women theologians who have argued in different contexts that while it was noble that African Theology was protesting the non-inclusion of African culture in both classical and liberation discourses, African Theology nonetheless portrayed the African *male* experience of culture as the norm. In this respect African women felt that their voices were not only excluded from this theologizing, but that their experiences of culture as negative forces within their lives were particularly being ignored. It is for this reason that the visionary Mercy Amba Oduyoye and others like her decided that if African women's engagement with theology and culture were going to be taken seriously, then African women would have to construct this theology themselves (Oduyoye, 1995). As Brigalia Bam could assert: "If ever there was going to be a Theology of Liberation for women, women had to construct it. It would not come automatically even from the most radical of our theologies" (Bam, 2005:10). And so African women's theologies of liberation, while finding continuity with African theologies, also pushed the boundaries and extended the discourses beyond the confines of male experiences as normative. Maluleke argued that African women's theologies were charting a new way and accurately

predicted that in the twenty-first century African women's theologies would be a force to be reckoned with:

Whereas Black and African theologies have for the past half-century argued for the validity of African Christianities and the legitimacy of African culture, African Feminist/Womanist theology is charting a new way. This theology is mounting a critique of both African culture and African Christianity in ways that previous African theologies have not been able to do. From these theologies, we may learn how to be truly African and yet be critical of aspects of African culture. African womanist theologians are teaching us how to criticise African culture without denigrating it, showing us that the one does not and should not necessarily lead to the other. My prediction is that the twenty-first century is going to produce an even more gendered African theology. All theologians and African churches will be well advised to begin to take heed (Maluleke, 1997:21–22).

African Women's Theologies vis-à-vis Feminist Theologies

In the same way that African women's theologies found both continuity with, and was critical of, African Theology, they shared a similar view of feminist theologies of the west. While I have used the terms "African women's theologies" and "feminist theologies in Africa" interchangeably thus far in this article, it must be noted that many African women theologians have problems identifying themselves as feminist. The challenges which they find with this term have been well documented in the article called *What's in a Name? Forging a Theoretical Framework for African Women's Theologies*, written by Isabel Phiri and Sarojini Nadar. The main difference between African women's theologies and feminist theologies, I would argue, lies in the emphasis each wishes to place on particular issues, rather than on an inherent difference in ideologies. In other words, each of the theologies, i.e. both western feminist and African feminist, are cut from the same cloth as it were, and the same adage that has been used by Alice Walker to describe the relationship between womanism and feminism can be used to describe African feminist theologies and western feminist theologies too—i.e. womanist is to feminist as the color purple is to the color lavender (Walker, 1983:xii). It is the emphasis of each theology which defines the contours; the defining focus of feminist theologies in Africa has been on culture. This focus on culture has not been in opposition to issues of gender, race, and class, but in addition or as complementary to these important factors. It is important, therefore, not to draw false dichotomies between feminist theologies in Africa and feminist theologies in the Global North, this false dichotomy usually being understood in terms of African feminist theologies being "softer" and more "conservative." The innovative and bold methods which African women have developed within theology and biblical hermeneutics bears testimony to this.

Methods and Features of Feminist Theologies in Africa

For over two decades women theologians in Africa have been developing and sharpening their theological methods in order to both speak to the academy from which many

of their theologies derive, and to also address their communities which inspire such theological reflections and analyses. These methods are characterised by five features—what I refer to in my teaching as “the 5 S’s of feminist theology in Africa,” namely Suspicion; Subjectivity; Story; Scrutiny and the “So-What?” question. Examples of African women’s theologies which illustrate a commitment to each of these characteristic features will be described and analysed in what follows.

Suspicion—Christian Tradition and Theology is both Patriarchal and Imperial

As already asserted, feminist theologies in Africa have maintained a critical solidarity with liberation theologies in general, which are suspicious of the imperial and patriarchal nature of Christian tradition and traditional forms of theologizing. These traditional or classical forms of theologizing have more often than not claimed to be universal and “objective.” Furthermore they have served to entrench western worldviews as normative. It is for this reason that African feminist theologians have sought indigenous forms of knowledge on which to base their theologies of liberation. The work of Rose Abbey (2001:140–59), the Ghanaian feminist theologian, is a good example of the search for the feminist within local theologies. She finds and reclaims the indigenous names used for God within the Akan culture and shows how names that were traditionally feminine were translated as masculine within Christian western forms of theologizing. Her work has been significant in exposing the imperial and patriarchal tendencies of classical theologies. Her groundbreaking study proposes a systematic doctrine of God within the framework of both an African and feminist understanding; an approach that parallels feminist theologians in the west such as Rosemary Radford Ruether (1983:47–71) who have sought to find, reclaim and reassert the feminine nature of the deities both as it is expressed in scripture and in traditional forms of religion. Rose Abbey’s theological method and insights therefore advance traditional systematic doctrine and traditional feminist doctrine, which are often steeped within western worldviews.

Subjectivity—The Specificity of Experience

While liberation theologies in general and feminist theologies in particular have stressed that experience is a legitimate starting point of theologizing, often liberation theologies have tended to use experience as a codeword for poor or black and have therefore tended to generalize on the experiences of third world subjects. Feminist theologies in Africa and the two-thirds world in general have been wary of this generalizing and often colonizing tendency to, as Mohanty (1988:63) declares, portray all third world women as oppressed or paint all African women with the same brush. African feminist theologies have sought to specify their localities and hence their theological methods based on their specific locations. This has resulted in culturally specific theological and hermeneutical methods such as *Bosadi* (Masenya, 1996, 1997), *Imbokodo* (Nzimande, 2008) and *Semoya* (Dube 1996). They have also not been afraid to engage their own contexts

in critical and affirming ways (see the work of Landman (1994) on Afrikaans women in South Africa for example). African women theologians have therefore not presumed that African culture is homogenous, and “unlike European imperial historians, explorers, and missionaries of the previous centuries, African [women] theologians have generally been wary of generalisations about ‘Africa’ and African culture” (Maluleke, 1997: 10). Maluleke further uses Mercy Oduyoye’s now classical book, *Daughters of Anowa* (1995), to show how serious attempts have been made to ensure that the terms “African culture” and “ATRs” have not been allowed to degenerate into meaningless generalizations and clichés” (Maluleke, 1997:10–11).

Story—Narrative Theology is African Women’s Theology

Well before the term narrative theology (cf. Hauerwas and Jones, 1989) became popular in the academy, African schools of thought and philosophy embraced and celebrated the power of stories. African feminist theologies have been no different. The work of feminist theologians in Africa bears testimony to this respect for story as a legitimate method and source of theology, and therefore African women’s theologies has aptly been named “narrative theologies” (Landman, 1996:100). Hence there are numerous examples of research and publications in the area of narrative theology. One of the most celebrated Circle books to be published features the story of the daughter of Anowa (Oduyoye, 1995). In her book, Oduyoye tells the story of “Anowa” a mythical woman belonging to various cultural traditions as a priest and a prophet. She uses Anowa’s story to create space to talk about African women and their participation in religion because she asserts that “she was the epitome of a woman participating fully in what is life-sustaining and life-protecting, someone worthy of being named an ancestress” (Oduyoye, 1995:7).

Further African women theologians have employed storytelling in their biblical hermeneutics. The collection of essays in the book *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible* edited by Musa Dube in 2001 bears testimony to this. In fact the first section of the book is devoted to “Storytelling Methods and Interpretations.” In this section, Masenya’s article entitled *Esther and Northern-Sotho Stories: An African-South African Woman’s Commentary* is a good example of how African women combine the arts of storytelling and biblical interpretation. In the same section, Musa Dube also offers a reading of Mark 5:24–43 and parallels the woman with the hemorrhage to Africa as a bleeding mother trying to save her children from the ravages of colonialism.

Besides using storytelling as a method, African women have also told their own stories of pain and patriarchal oppression as a means to analyze and overcome such oppression (see for example Nadar, 2000; Phiri, 1996, 2000). While telling their stories places them in a position of vulnerability, the stories also become authoritative dialogical texts. As Oduoye (2001:10) has asserted, “African women accept story as a source of theology and so tell their stories as well as study the experiences of other women including those outside their own continent, but especially those in Africa whose stories remain unwritten.”

Scrutiny—Not just the Right Answers but the Right Questions

While the works of African women theologians to a large extent have focused on a theology of hope as is evidenced with the near obsession with the phrase *Talitha Qumi*—Daughter Arise³ in the work of African women theologians, this is not to say that African women have not approached their contexts and theologies critically. While the over-use of the biblical phrase *Talitha Qumi* suggests an over-reliance on the Bible as a source of liberation, African feminist scholars have not been afraid to scrutinize the Bible from a critical perspective too. So, while in what can arguably be named *Talitha Qumi* theologies, culture is seen as oppressive and the gospel as liberating, African women have also offered alternatives to the Bible being used as only a source of liberation in African theology (contra Mbiti, 1979:90 who argued that “Any viable theology must and should have a biblical basis”).

In fact, it is not just culture that has been the focus in African women’s theologies but the interconnectedness of issues of race, class, and gender that have also been at the forefront of African women’s theologizing. This interconnectedness is worked out in many of the writings of Musa Dube, who names her methodology “postcolonial feminist hermeneutics.” In a context where the Bible is taken as almost sacrosanct, as is captured by Mbiti’s (1979:90) emphatic statement “Nothing can substitute for the Bible”, Dube’s bold scrutiny of the oppressive nature of the Bible toward women, and the ways in which the Bible is not just patriarchal but imperial, is to be commended. While Dube’s work has taken a critical stance toward issues of race and class in the Bible, other South African women of the Circle have also taken on the issues of race and class in the South African context (Landman, 2002; Masenya, 1995, 2002).

So What?—The Most Important Question We can Ask Ourselves as Feminists is “So What?”

The fifth feature of African feminist theologies is its focus on activism. Lillian Robinson has reminded us that “the most important question we can ask ourselves as feminists is ‘so what?’” (quoted in Newton and Rosenfelt, 1985:xv). Newton and Rosenfelt go on to argue that inherent in that question is a view that most of us as feminists share—“that the point of our work is to change the world.” If there is one thing that does distinguish African women theologians from their sisters elsewhere, it is probably this “so what?” question. As with traditional liberation theologies, African women theologians have worked within the “see, judge, act” paradigm. There is a distinct focus of “act” in the work of African women theologians. They are interested in scholarship not for its own sake, but for the ways in which it can change their lives and those of their sisters. It is for this reason that Teresa Okure (1993:77) points out, African women’s “primary consciousness in doing theology is not method, but life and life concerns—their own and those of their own peoples.”

Mercy Oduyoye (2001:16) further maintains that “Women do theology to undergird and nourish a spirituality for life. And so from the affirmations of faith, which they make . . . flows the praxis that gives birth to liberating and life-enhancing visions and further actions and reflections.” It is for this reason that many African women

theologians are engaged in community Bible studies and other forms of engagement (Nadar, 2006; Dube, 1996; Kanyoro, 2001). African feminist theologians therefore do not find it helpful to draw harsh distinctions between activism and academia. These two areas in the life and work of African feminist theologians are not mutually exclusive—they are simply a continuous never-ending spiral of action and reflection.

Problems With, and Possibilities For, the Future of Feminist Theologies in Africa

Each of the five characteristic features of African women's theologies, and the subsequent creation and development of innovative theological methods examined in the foregoing article, provide us with both challenges to and possibilities for the future of feminist theologies in Africa. How might these challenges be met, and the possibilities be taken up, in an increasing resurgence of conservative religion all over the world?

The first feature of African women's theologies as described above was suspicion—the idea that one needs to be wary of the imperializing and less than life-giving theologies that emanate from the church and elsewhere. I would argue that in the context of a resurgence of conservative religion all over the world, particularly given that most churches in Africa have eschewed traditional forms of worship and spirituality for a more Americanized or European form of “globalized gospel,” a healthy dose of a hermeneutic of suspicion is exactly what is needed, and African feminist theologians would do well to pursue this hermeneutic in their work.

The second feature of feminist theologies in Africa that was presented and analyzed was the notion of subjectivity and specificity in both the description of the contexts and the methods of theologizing that are employed in the work of African feminist theologians. While the use of subjective experiences and specific contexts are important, so that Africa is not presented as homogenous and clichéd, African feminist discourse should also be wary of using indigenous resources uncritically. For example, even the approach of *Bosadi* proposed by Madipoane Masenya has been critiqued as a patriarchal construct (Maluleke, 2001:243).

Thirdly, the focus on personal story and storytelling as a method in African women's theologies is certainly a method that fits in with the more accessible forms of theologizing that African theology in general has become well known for. However, notwithstanding that stories might seem based more “on talent, intuition, or clinical experience [and] defies clear order and systematization” (Lieblich et al., 1998:1), it must be noted that stories must not naively be perceived as comprehensive and precise depictions of truth. In other words, we must recognize that all stories have a bias and an ideology embedded within. As Lieblich et al. have concluded through their study on narrative:

We believe that stories are usually constructed around a core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for the freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these ‘remembered facts’ (1998:8).

And so African women too have to be prepared to have their stories tested and contested, since their ability to convey “truth” is always dependent on the way in which such “truth” is presented—the “remembered facts.”

Fourthly I have shown that another feature of African feminist theologies is its ability to scrutinize existing “truths.” A significant source of “truth” in African theology and popular Christianity in Africa still remains the Bible. As Oduyoye (1995:174) has argued: “Throughout Africa, the Bible has been and continues to be absolutized: it is one of the oracles that we consult for instant solutions and responses.” In this increasingly globalized Christian context which we find ourselves in—the power of the Bible as authoritative, particularly when it comes to the oppression of women, is now more than ever a concern. It is for this reason that the scrutiny with which African women have started to look at the Bible has to be developed and encouraged. The Bible, like culture, cannot continue to be used uncritically as a source of African theology, when its authoritative effects are less than life-giving for African women.

Finally, I argued that an important feature of African feminist theology has been its focus on praxis—making a difference in the communities from which we come. I think theologians have something to learn from African women in this regard. Denise Ackermann the “mother” of the Circle in Cape Town, the place at which this article began has harsh words for those who do not follow the principles of theological praxis:

So much of our scholarly and intellectual work has little relevance for communities of faith, and it is not surprising that these communities themselves take little interest in it . . . The failure to speak theological words into the moment has been costly . . . We grapple with evil and suffering while we seek hope. In these circumstances the navel-gazing and in-house games of certain bourgeois theologies are irrelevant, even reprehensible (Ackermann, 2003:37).

Conclusion

If we trace the history of feminist theologies in Africa back to the beginning of the formation of the Circle in 1989, then feminist theologies in Africa have been going strong for two decades. In this article I have attempted to show that their continuity with and distinction from African theology and western feminist theologies have: developed and pushed the boundaries of a hermeneutic of suspicion; have avoided the trap of the “third world difference” and have spoke from their own positions of subjectivity and specific contexts; have broken through the barriers of traditional academic discourses with their own traditions of storytelling; have applied methods of scrutiny to the Bible and theology by not just providing the right answers but asking the right questions; and finally have constantly sought to answer that ever-important question—so what?

Notes

- 1 I use the terms African women’s theologies and African feminist theologies or feminist theologies in Africa interchangeably.
- 2 This program was first coordinated by the immanent African theologian, Tinyiko Maluleke, and is currently occupied by the equally immanent theologian, Isabel Phiri.

- 3 See the various Circle books that have been published with this name: Oduyoye, M.A. and Kanyoro, M.R.A. (eds). 1990. *Talitha, Qumi!: Proceedings of the Convocation of African Women Theologians 1989* (Ibadan: Daystar Press); Oduyoye, M.A. and Kanyoro, M.R.A. (eds). 1992. *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books); Njoroge, N. and Dube, M.W. (eds). *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications).

CHAPTER 19

Church and Reconciliation

Tinyiko Maluleke

Introduction

They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying "peace, peace" when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they committed abominations? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says the Lord. Thus says the Lord: Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, "we will not walk in it."

Jeremiah 6:14–5 Revised Standard Version

There is no denying that the basic idea behind the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) process is a noble one. After years of apartheid and its dire consequences, South Africans do need national healing. This is especially true since black people have been dehumanized and oppressed for more than 300 years. South Africa is indeed a wounded nation. The wounds go beyond what can be seen with the naked eye and beyond what has been recorded or celebrated: Our nation needs healing. Victims and survivors who bore the brunt of the apartheid system need healing. Perpetrators are, in their own way, victims of the apartheid system and they, too, need healing (Tutu, 1997:8). Having made that acknowledgment, it remains necessary for us to debate whether the current TRC process, as it has been established and as it has been proceeding, will be a catalyst for such national healing to take place. It is necessary therefore to ask whether this process goes far and deep enough to probe the wound of our nation so as to expose it to thorough rather than light healing. Unfortunately, in the enthusiasm for national healing and in the wake of the now fully operational TRC industry, a climate for honest and intense debate on the TRC has not been fostered. Many have therefore learnt either to sing the TRC's praises or to hold their peace.

Let me hasten to add that nothing can be taken away from the TRC project as it has developed so far. Some of the revelations of amnesty applicants and of victims have shocked the nation. Many South Africans especially white South Africans have been shocked by what they have seen and heard. Some of the decisions of the Amnesty Committee for example the granting of amnesty to Dirk Coetzee have been equally controversial. So it would be dishonest to deny that the TRC's work has picked up momentum, beyond what many skeptics believed, especially during 1997. However, whether we have, as a result, more truth as a result of full disclosures before the TRC's Amnesty Committee remains a debatable matter. Nor can we measure how much healing the investigations, the hearings and the amnesty applications have effected. We can, however, comment on what we perceive, hear, and see.

Extraordinary Magnanimity

God has endowed our continent and its inhabitants with wonderful gifts. We must look to African solutions for African problems . . . Nowhere else in the world have they got a Truth and Reconciliation Commission such as we have in Africa; in South Africa. The world marvels to behold the extraordinary magnanimity, the nobility of spirit that is ready to forgive the enemy. A Nelson Mandela is kept in the gaol for 27 years and comes out, not filled with bitterness or with a lust for revenge; instead he came out with [the] readiness to forgive those who wronged him so grievously. Such remarkable grace is found not only in South Africa . . . We have a gift to share with the world; it is the virtue of Ubuntu, that essence of being human in which my humanity is caught up in your humanity, where a person is a person through other persons because we are made for family, for togetherness, for friendship, for harmony, for sharing, for generosity and hospitality (Tutu, 1997).

For Tutu such magnanimity and nobility of spirit as shown in the TRC is a demonstration of, and a fitting tribute to, the African ethic of *ubuntu*. The TRC and the processes associated with it have been widely hailed as an exemplary, unprecedented (Müller-Fahrenheit, 1996:21), contemporary miracle (Botman, 1996:39) and an essential element in the politics of grace (Petersen, 1996:63). Because of the TRC and its work, Botman (1996:39) further declares:

There is no place to hide anymore. Truth has captured the street, at the working place, in the local faith communities and the homes of many people . . . And this time it is the stories of the victims that they hear. Every time they hear the stories, the contemporary miracle happens: the deaf begin to hear! And every time the mothers of the victims cry and Desmond Tutu wipes a tear, the contemporary miracle happens: the blind begin to see.

Similarly, Albie Sachs has praised the African comrade's power or prerogative to be the forgiving one (in Asmal et al., 1996:49). However, is the TRC only a demonstration of *ubuntu* magnanimity? Is it an essential element of the politics of grace? Or do we have reason to wonder whether, in fact this grace was taken too easily, whether it has become Bonhoeffer's cheap grace, demanding neither repentance nor conversion of attitude

and life which it seeks (Petersen, 1996:62). Is it not primarily a pragmatic and part of a less than satisfactory by-product of a political trade-off between political parties? Furthermore, is it being as successful as it is portrayed in the writings of its enthusiasts? Cognizance must never be lost of the fact that the TRC was born in the negotiation chambers between South African political parties mainly the white National Party and the African National Congress. In the rather simplistic words of Müller-Fahrenholz (1996:85):

The ANC wanted a Truth Commission, the National Party favored a Reconciliation Commission. The former were concerned about the victims of apartheid, the latter were looking for amnesty for the perpetrators. The result was the National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 26 July 1995, which established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Indeed, the final clause of the interim constitution, which legislated the possibility of the TRC, almost subordinated reconciliation to the granting of amnesty. It was a clause mainly about amnesty and not reparations. Note the following paragraph from this clause:

In order to advance such reconciliation and reconstruction, amnesty shall be granted in respect of acts, omissions and offences associated with political objectives and committed in the course of conflicts of the past. To this end, parliament under this Constitution shall adopt a law determining a firm cut-off date . . . and mechanisms, criteria and procedures, including tribunals, if any, through which such amnesty shall be dealt with at any time after the law has been passed (quoted by Omar, 1996:25).

The struggle to control the aims of the TRC in party political terms did not cease with the promulgation of the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, a struggle most pronounced between the ANC and the National Party. In their extremely partisan book, foreshadowing the TRC, Asmal et al. (1996) mount spirited arguments for the decriminalizing of resistance against apartheid as well as what they call the morality and humanity of (armed) resistance. However, a closer reading of the book reveals an uncanny reduction of South African history and diversity of resistance to that of the ANC. The entire book gives one the impression that South Africa consisted of two realities, apartheid and the ANC's resistance to it. Other political and non-political resistances to apartheid are marginalized: in the 216 pages of the book, the PAC is mentioned twice and both times in connection with the ANC; Inkatha is mentioned three times in connection with hit squads and collaboration; the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) is not mentioned once, nor is the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania (BCMA). I am afraid this may simply be part of the political rivalry between the ANC and the National Party in book form, so as to give the rivalry an intellectual veneer.

Two significant facts about the TRC need to be openly acknowledged: namely that it was part of the political settlement which catapulted the ANC into power without having been militarily victorious; and secondly that the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act No. 34 of 1995 defines and put significant limits to what the TRC can/should do and achieve. Without questioning the extent to which the

negotiating political parties were desirous of national healing, it is true to say that at that stage it was political power and impunity rather than national healing that were at stake. As a result, the Act is formulated in such a way as to put the spotlight on the foot soldiers rather than the persons or institutions which planned and legitimised gross violations of human rights letting most politicians off the hook! Nor is the TRC process as successful as Botman suggests above. There is little evidence that the truth has captured the imagination of many South Africans. As the TRC proceeds with its work, apartheid or Third-Force related violence continues in the KwaZulu-Natal province and the thousands of victims who appeared before the TRC still await relief. In contrast, the fate of amnesty applicants was finalised and enshrined in the law beforehand with the result that those who were granted amnesty did not have to wait, but received amnesty immediately.

The truth is that the danger exists for the TRC to fail in its tasks especially in the absence of vigorous and informed debates and inputs about its competencies and objectives. As part of a political settlement, could the TRC achieve much more than a political balance of blame (*Natal Witness*, 1977) blame for the National Party, some for the ANC, a little blame for Inkatha, Pan Africanist Congress, etc.? For reconciliation would not be possible if one side emerged from the hearings looking impossibly bad, while the other side, the various liberation movements, including the ANC, were to continue to present themselves as saintly (*Natal Witness*, 1997).

Understandably, therefore, we have seen various political parties jostling for control of the TRC often with much mud-slinging. On the church front, one notices little and hears even less. There is silence. One of the enduring deficits of the TRC process is the fact that there was little open and public debate prior to the formulation of TRC legislation. At that time, political parties appear to have had *carte blanche* rights and space to negotiate on behalf of the people appealing to people only as part of their power-plays e.g. threatening mass action or military violence, but not appealing to people in any consultative manner.

Deafening Theological Silence

Except for a few voices in the wilderness, it is true that there has been little systematic reflection on the theological, moral, and religious questions that the TRC process raises for the churches (Botman and Petersen, 1996:12). In contrast, the South African media is having a field day with TRC columns, articles, television talks, and shows. There is a semi-permanent TRC slot on our national TV and radio news as well as a few TRC-centred programs on both TV and radio. If one were to read South African newspapers, listen to South African radio stations and watch South African TV for one week only, one would certainly get the impression that the TRC was a phenomenon of great national and historic significance. Or is it merely a newsworthy item with built-in sensational possibilities? The question I am posing is whether there is a relation between the media and government investment in the TRC on the one hand and the participation and lively interest of ordinary South African citizens in it. It appears as if there is

a discrepancy between the TRC as media event, as a highly prized government project, and as a happening capable of engaging the entire nation.

International Interest

We must note that the South African TRC model is of immense global interest, especially for Europe and the USA, where there is a growing view that the human world of the twenty-first century is shaping up as a world in which peace among nations is a practical necessity, not merely an elusive, optional ideal (Shriver, 1995:5). When the European Ecumenical Assembly had its second assembly in June 1997 in Graz, Austria, they chose the theme: "Reconciliation: God's gift and source of new life." The significance of the South African TRC model for European churches was underscored by the invitation of Brigalia Bam, the General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches (SACC), to give a keynote speech on that occasion (Bam, 1997). She spoke on the TRC process in South Africa. A European theologian has concluded that through the work of the TRC, it is clear that South Africa is engaged in an unprecedented exercise of deep remembering (Müller-Fahrenholz, 1996:87). He goes on to say:

It is not only the peace of the New South Africa that is at stake here. The approach of the TRC is relevant all over the world. It is a challenge to the so-called realists who say that the only criterion for politics should be the interest of the nations . . . the South African approach is an important experiment in relating ethics to politics (Müller-Fahrenholz, 1996:99).

However, to return to my earlier line of questioning, is there more to the South African TRC process than media hype and immense international interest? Why do many South Africans especially Christians and theologians appear to be less intensely interested in the TRC process than the media and the international community? In any case, if there is popular indifference to the TRC in South Africa it is not because of lack of trying by the media nor is it because of lack of international interest.

Massive Skepticism, Disdainful Apathy, and Denial

It appears that there is a massive undercurrent of skepticism about the TRC in the black community. While they are neither entirely accurate nor serious, the caricatures that black people make of the TRC as the Kleenex Commission or the Tears and Reconciliation Commission could point to a deeper level of discontent. Yet, it must be said that black people as a whole have been visible by their presence at TRC hearings and its ceremonies. However, black people are interested in much more than what happens within the four walls of TRC offices and hearings-halls. Indeed, it is possible that while the TRC events are viewed as providing a curious side-show, black people are more interested in the fulfillment of the promises made to them at election time as well as a material demonstration of remorse and restitution by all white people in the country.

There is, therefore, a sense in which the *success* or *failure* of the TRC will be decided more by developments outside of the sombre halls of TRC hearings and amnesty applications. Here, the questions of land restitution and real economic power will loom large. Unless judicial reconciliation which is what the TRC hopes to establish as a basis for national reconciliation is accompanied by economic and other forms of reconciliation, we are unlikely to experience full and genuine reconciliation in South Africa.

Commenting on the white people's apathy towards or even disdain for the TRC process, Müller-Fahrenheit (1996:89) says: "Cain, where are you? White brother, where are you? Don't you need to listen to Abel's story? Why do we not see you attending the hearings? Are you trying to pretend that you were not there when all this happened?" The TRC Chairperson Bishop Tutu himself is reported to have said that while there was a real desire for reconciliation to happen, especially in the black community, . . . there is not the same kind of enthusiasm in the white communities (in Friedman and Gool, 1997). Sensing not only this lack of enthusiasm from whites, but a constant complaining and finger-pointing, Petersen (1996:62) notes:

In complaints about crime, about squatters, about the disruption of services through strike action, about corruption and fraud, there is very, very little self-reflection, let alone self-criticism, which sees in these horrendous social crises the legacy of white domination. Having so graciously been forgiven, having at tremendous political cost been offered a new place in the sun, it would often seem that this is interpreted as a *carte blanche* to criticise and condemn the new and fragile democracy. Instead of accepting the miracles of grace with humility, repentance, and a desire for conversion, too often this grace is treated as a right, as a national product of a democracy. But a possible reason for white denial to face up to their complicity in apartheid may be because they do indeed feel a deep sense of shame which causes them to avoid confrontation and to erect barricades of innocence and indifference . . . We did not do it! We did not know it! At least we did not want it to be done this way! (Müller-Fahrenheit, 1996:89).

Alternatively, it could simply be a case of whites being victims of the overwhelming trauma of the truth (Krog, 1997:10), for truth does not automatically liberate; it can also overwhelm and numb people. To face up to the truth of extreme guilt, human beings need to be held and comforted (Müller-Fahrenheit, 1996:90). But how do masters even contemplate the possibility of being comforted by their maids, servants, girls and boys?

Theological Comment on the TRC So Far: Exploring the Silence and Absence

Although I have underscored the prevalence of silence in ecclesiastical and theological circles regarding the TRC process, it would not be entirely accurate to say that there is complete and utter silence. Even silence is a form of eloquence. It appears that the ability to explore, listen to, interpret, and articulate silence is one of the theological

skills needed in the new South Africa. As well as an erudite social analysis, we need a silence analysis for we are going through a time of interesting, varied and pregnant silences. Mosala (1994:147) has said the following in relation to biblical hermeneutics, but it can be safely and usefully applied to the kind of social hermeneutics we need in order to understand the current South African situation:

It seems to me that in seeking to develop a hermeneutic of good news to the poor in the Third World, the question is no longer on which side God is. That was a good question for its time. Now however, the relevant question is how to interpret the eloquence with which the poor are silent and the absence through which they are present . . . It is in struggling with these silences and absences that a new creative reappropriation of the liberation of the gospel takes place.

Our theological task, then, will include the exploration and articulation of the silences. However, without discarding the duty of unmasking the silence of the rich, the powerful, the white, and the male, our special calling is one of interpreting and articulating the eloquence with which the increasingly poor and increasingly marginalized people of this country are silent: "Today the marginal, popular peoples' church has lost its voice. It no longer speaks vibrantly and sharply. It has been muzzled" (Pityana, 1995:98). However, what appears like confused, stunned, or frightened silence may in fact be a calculated and prudent silence. There are various orders of silence, closely connected to the social location and material conditions of the silent. The meaning of the silence of the rich is not likely to be the same as that of the poor. Indeed, the silence of Jesus before Pilate is qualitatively different from the silence and apathy of Herod in the passion narrative.

In the same way that their views and perceptions of the TRC differ, the silence of white people on the TRC is qualitatively different from the silence of black people. The silences differ in order and meaning because often the *silencing process* is also different. Some are silenced by powerlessness and yet some are silent because they are powerful and it is in their interest to be silent! What then are the meanings of the silences of the South African churches and their theologians at this time in the history of South Africa? Is it the calculated silence of power or is it the crushing silence of powerlessness? In addition we must ask, not merely on whose side the churches are, but on whose side the churches are *silent*? The silences with which the South African church and theological scene is now replete must be faced honestly, explored, unmasked and carefully articulated especially in instances where we are personally involved.

Borrowing from the notions of hidden and public transcripts (Scott, 1990), I believe that West (1997:6) may help us in beginning to explore the meanings of the alleged silence of the poor and the marginalised. I agree with him in suggesting that our role as theologians (or organic intellectuals) consists in more than merely conscientising the marginalized to break their silence, for the culture of silence may be a strategy which should not be disrupted without consultation with the marginalized silent ones. However, it may not be a bad idea to expose, unmask and articulate the silence of the rich, the powerful, the white and the male!

Exploring the Church and Theological Silence

Many explanations for the theological silence are possible most of them are nothing but plain excuses. The first explanation is the myth of deployment to which I referred in my earlier work (Maluleke, 1997a:69). I argued then for a nuanced if not sympathetic view of the myth of deployment. I now wonder whether the myth of deployment is itself anything more than a transparently convenient excuse for an equally convenient silence on behalf of the church. The alleged deployment is a thoroughly tenuous one with no basis in practical and factual reality.

Secondly, there is the explanation encapsulated in the sentiment often expressed thus: We need to give the Mandela government time. It is too early to expect much from a government which has only been in power for three years. When this is said we are often reminded of the apartheid legacy with which our present historic government has been left to deal with. Thus workers have been advised to tighten their belts. However, the emerging (small but powerful) black elite class which includes politicians and top civil servants are neither tightening their belts nor waiting. Property and land owners the overwhelming majority of whom are white are not waiting to give the New South Africa a chance. They are cashing in on their constitutionally entrenched property rights and the lucrative demand-related property prices as middle class blacks flood the previously whites-only suburbs. As the whites cash in on their apartheid-inspired fortunes, they complain endlessly about deteriorating standards and the crime rate.

Yet another explanation for silence is an extension or variation of the myth of deployment, namely the suggestion that South African churches have been weakened by the loss of many able and skilled leaders. In my earlier article (Maluleke, 1997a), I had taken a very sympathetic view to this suggestion, admitting that the South African ecumenical and theological communities were indeed weaker due to the loss of skilled leaders. Now I am not so sure. The truth of the matter is that it is South African Christians, churches, and communities that produced these leaders, not vice versa. Have South African churches suddenly become so dependent on the few leaders they moulded that they must now cease to be prophetic simply because these leaders are now employed somewhere in the government and its structures? Furthermore, the South African ecumenical and prophetic movements did not only produce individual leaders. We did not only produce bishop Tutu, Frank Chikane, Beyers Naude, and others; we also evolved strong ecumenical bodies and organizations to institutionalize and depersonalize their ideas. I am thinking here of organizations such as the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) and the South African Council of Churches (SACC) as well as its several regional councils. We did not only produce Itumeleng Mosala, Takatso Mofokeng, Simon Maimela, Mokgethi Motlhabi, Allan Boesak, Gabriel Setiloane, Manas Buthelezi, and others; we also constructed a radical local theology South African Black Theology a theology which is bigger than the contributions of these individual theologians. To say, therefore, that the theological silence of today is due to the tremendous loss of theologians and leaders is nothing but an excuse. It is not only a refusal to face up to the genuine reasons for our silence, but also a refusal to own up to the side on which we are silent.

The fourth explanation for theological silence is captured in the rather unfortunate words attributed to Bishop Tutu, who is alleged to have said after the release of Mandela and the unbanning of political organizations in South Africa that the church must now go back to being the church (West, 1997:5). The hidden charge here is that the South African church was not really the church when it urged Christians to participate in the struggle for liberation and for a just society (Kairos Document, 1985:28). In seeking to become churches again, many South African churches have reverted to massive ecumenical and political apathy as well as an upsurge of denominationalism (cf. De Gruchy, 1995). Church denominations are now engaging in inward-looking rather than outward-looking activities. It is tragically ironic that when the nation was divided by apartheid we found our unity in the struggle, and now, at the precise moment when the new South Africa is seeking to achieve national reconciliation, the church seems to be going back into its denominational shells. An era of national reconciliation must surely challenge us to become more deeply reconciled with each other within the body of Christ (De Gruchy, 1995:14). The warning of West (1997:12) is crucial, both in helping us to see the futility of going back to being the church and finding a possible way forward:

The church must not *go back* to being the church; rather, shaped by the struggles and stories of the vast majority of its members, the church must *go forward* to being a church that facilitates the subjugated, incipient, and hidden theologies and readings of those whose working faith was forged in their daily struggles against the forces of death and with the God of life.

The fifth and final point of exploration may have to do with a misunderstanding of the implications of the present government's secularist policies (De Gruchy, 1997). There are two extreme and unhelpful positions that tend to be taken here: On the one hand there are those Christians who equate a secular state with a God-less even anti-Christian state especially the so-called right-wing groups. On the other hand there are those who view a secular state as implying that all religions must now look only inward, equating all forms of public religious witness as aggressiveness and intolerance. These could include many churches within the ecumenical family who are suffering from the acute guilt of having protested much too softly, without vigorous resistance, against apartheid, and having been hegemonic, with little tolerance for other religions. Both stances have understandable historical roots in South Africa, but they are neither satisfactory nor acceptable, especially as explanations and reasons for church and theological silence. Right-wing groups have of course not been silent, especially on secular-state issues and the abortion debate. But they too have been silent on political and socio-economic issues.

Theological Advocacy

Much of the theological comment on the TRC so far has been at the practical and advocacy level, where churches and religious people are simply encouraged to support

the TRC in various ways (cf. Maluleke, 1997a:74). While advocacy essays have been very constructive, there is need to go beyond this. The task of churches and theologians is not merely to advertise the TRC and call on people to support it. Nor is our task mainly and only in helping people either to understand or use the present TRC process adequately. We must do more than either producing manuals on how to apply for amnesty or giving pastoral care to the victims who make submissions before the TRC. Our task is to probe the provisions upon which the TRC has been established, observe its competencies and functions and do so with a clear distinction between TRC ideals and its actual progress on the ground. Such probing must be done against the background of our own radical theologies of liberation. Indeed more than the production of human rights manuals (SACC, 1997) is required. It is not as if the existence of the constitution and the so-called instruments of democracy such as the Bill of Rights, Gender Commission, Human Rights Commission, TRC, and the Land Commission are sufficient in and of themselves so that all that is left is simple and mere application. These instruments and the philosophies/theologies upon which they are based still need to be debated.

Evaluating Critical Theological Comment So Far

South African theologians recognize that the notions of truth and reconciliation lie in the heart of at least the Christian tradition (Botman and Petersen, 1996b:12), that Christianity is the religion of reconciliation (Moltmann, 1992:63), and that “reconciliation is our job, the industry we work in . . . [and the] reason for our existence” (Smit, 1995:3). However, there has been a paucity of critical theological reflections on the TRC in general and such theological concepts as truth, reconciliation and forgiveness in particular. The only collection of serious theological reflections on the TRC remains, as mentioned already, Botman and Petersen (1996). Almost all the essays in this book express a recognition of the need for both the TRC and the task of national healing. Many of them encourage South Africans to support the TRC process in various ways. Some, particularly the two editors, Petersen and Botman, make rather glib statements of praise to both the TRC and the Mandela government (Maluleke, 1997b).

Vigilant Theological Reflection

It is one thing to acknowledge the need for national healing even reconciliation or national unity but it is something else not to probe whether the processes, strategies, discourses, gesticulations, and theologies currently in circulation are conducive to genuine national healing and genuine reconciliation. This is where much of the current theological comment on the TRC process has been extremely deficient. If national healing, unity, and reconciliation are indeed crucial for the people of South Africa, then we need sharp, thorough, deep, and honest theological reflection on it. Is the legislation on which the TRC has been established empowering and liberating? What does the legislation and the TRC process do to the victims? Is there a concrete, even if only emerging, material basis for the TRC’s work of reconciliation so that it can be meaningful to

the victims, or is the entire TRC only meant to be symbolic in the most abstract sense of the word (cf. Mosala, 1987)?

The New Theology of Reconciliation

Statements to the effect that the work of the TRC is a deeply spiritual, theological, and moral endeavor (Villa-Vicencio, 1996:138) must not be taken at face value. While it could be possible for the TRC to become a spiritual, theological, and moral endeavor, the ideal must not be mistaken for the actual. It may be true that reconciliation, spirituality, and morality are indeed central to the Christian faith, but how they are understood and applied within the context of the TRC is another matter. Employing a hermeneutic of suspicion, we should seek to unmask and explore the spirituality and theology of the TRC process, inspired as it is by legal and political-settlement motivations.

In the same way that the Kairos theologians explored, unmasked and identified Church and State theologies, theologians should be unmasking and exploring the distinctive theology, spirituality and morality of the TRC process. It appears to be a theology based on some political and legal hijacking of notions such as truth, reconciliation and forgiveness. What the Kairos theologians said about hijacked Christian notions such as reconciliation by what they dubbed church theology may be useful to recall now:

There are conflicts where one side is a fully armed and violent oppressor while the other side is defenseless and oppressed. There are conflicts that can only be described as the struggle between justice and injustice, good and evil, God and the devil. To speak of reconciling these two is not only a mistaken application of the Christian idea of reconciliation, it is a total betrayal of all that Christian faith has ever meant (Kairos Document, 1985:17).

The basis upon which current TRC-type reconciliation is sought and understood must be explored. For now the basis appears to be the following: perpetrators get amnesty, victims get their stories told and some possible reparations and the nation gets the truth. These must be viewed against other national initiatives geared towards national reconciliation. Such would include some of the socio-economic projects which are meant to create wealth and jobs. But is the lot of the lowest among the victims, the poor, the female, and the black in South Africa being improved through measures such as the TRC process? Can full and genuine reconciliation be found within the framework of the present TRC process?

The spirituality and morality of the TRC are partly characterized by much tears on the part of victims, periodic religious ceremonies, court-room-like amnesty applications, high salaries for the commissioners and lawyers (Mda, 1997a, 1997b), and an ever-increasing bill for the taxpayer. It is a spirituality based on the use of the need for national healing as an absolute principle which is so crucial that it is better to be doing something purporting to support that aim, however superficial and futile the something might be. The morality of the TRC process offers a clearly defined set of requirements for amnesty but ambiguous and non-existent criteria for reparations

and the rehabilitation of victims. The theology of the TRC is one of restorative justice for the perpetrators but one which demands or at least subtly expects black people not to succumb to bitterness, anger or aggression no matter how much they are exploited or traumatised (Boesak, 1996:67).

Liberated by Stories?

Much has been made of the supposedly liberating story-telling and narrative possibilities that the TRC opens up for everyone, especially the so-called victims (cf. Botman, 1996; Villa-Vicencio, 1996). But the truth is that the TRC context only allows for extremely edited stories, if at all. These stories must first be submitted in legal statement form and lawyers can prevent story-tellers from mentioning the names of their clients. And many victims simply do not have the money to oppose amnesty applications legally. The few who scrape together enough money to oppose amnesty applications have, due to the very strong bias of the Promotion of National Unity Act towards the perpetrators, only one possible but tenuous ground for opposing amnesty applications, namely lack of full disclosure. To prove lack of full disclosure is not only difficult but very costly and many victims cannot afford it. What we are hearing is not the whole story it is perhaps not even a story; what we are hearing are often legal forms of yet to be told stories (West, 1997:10).

Plausible Theology

There is a plausible theology being cooked, some contours of which we have highlighted above to pacify the victims and rationalize the inequalities. It is a devious theology because in many instances it has stolen the terminology and the gestures of Liberation Theology and if one does not listen carefully one might even think one is still hearing the passionate and radical sounds of Liberation Theology, Black Theology, and African Theology. All the right words are there: reconciliation, justice, non-racism, non-sexism, solidarity, etc. The musical tune is familiar but the meaning and contents have changed and the gestures are empty. Solidarity with the poor has made way for the notion of critical solidarity with the state (Nolan, 1995:152) and a unilateral redefinition of the struggle:

... the prophetic task of the church in post-apartheid South Africa must be redefined in terms of critical solidarity. The struggle is no longer to be understood primarily in terms of resistance and liberation, but in terms of reconstruction and transformation. Being in critical *solidarity* means giving support for those initiatives which may lead to the establishment not only of a new, but also just, social order. It means that the church remains prophetic in its stance towards a new democratically elected government, that it must stand for the truth, but *now on the basis of a shared commitment to the realization of national reconstruction* [emphasis mine] (De Gruchy, 1996:221f).

Note how transformation and reconstruction are substituted for liberation and how former commitment to the poor has now become a shared commitment with the state (cf. Maluleke, 1996b, 1996c) and this is put forward as the new basis of prophetic Christianity. But this is a huge ideological and theological shift, which cannot be explained away by a love for democracy and a just society. The appearance of a government which is allegedly committed to a just/democratic society and national reconstruction has not eliminated poverty from South Africa. Are we seeing therefore a change of loyalties here from the poor to the powerful? Are former prophetic theologians becoming state theologians? Apparently liberationist notions and issues like racism, sexism, economic issues, justice, you name it, continue to be rehearsed and referred to, but the frameworks, starting points, solidarities and commitments are different.

Commissioners, Perpetrators, and Victims on Stage

I have hinted above at the limitations imposed by the Promotion of National Unity legislation. Elsewhere (Maluleke, 1997a:64) I pointed out that this piece of legislation tends to fasten onto the bloody and gruesome details of the activities of the foot soldiers who carried out instructions [or were allowed to be a law unto themselves], without getting to the thinkers, planners and legitimizers of apartheid's criminal activities, except by way of implication. One of the recent developments around the activities of the TRC has been the phenomenon of group or institutional submissions from the media, some legal bodies and some church bodies. But since the TRC legislation has not really been properly geared to such institutional probing, these group submissions have often been clumsy and self-justifying. Nor are the objectives of such group hearings clear. If amnesty can be given to a perpetrator who makes a full disclosure should such amnesty also be given to institutions, bodies, communities, and organizations that produced, fostered, and nurtured the perpetrators? The submissions of churches will soon be highlighted at the forthcoming Faith-Communities Hearings scheduled for 17–19th November 1997.

I agree with both Bam (1997) and Mamdani (1997) that the categories of perpetrators and victims tend to reduce the apartheid system to the experiences of a tiny minority of people. There are many more victims and perpetrators than those making submissions and amnesty applications. An even more serious problem is that the process has the potential to reduce the rest of us into spectators in a play whose main actors are the commissioners, victims, and perpetrators. Mamdani also argues that as well as perpetrators and victims the category of beneficiaries needs to be added for the perpetrators are only a tiny minority of the beneficiaries.

Under the Spell of Mandela and Tutu

If the previous dispensation was one of the Afrikaner Nationalist Party, we have now entered a new period. We are now in the period of Nelson Mandela and Bishop Desmond

Tutu. It is true that both have been potent symbols of resistance for a considerable part of the forty-year Afrikaner rule. But now, Tutu and Mandela have moved to center stage and they define and encapsulate hegemony. What we are finding is that doing theology in the Mandela–Tutu era is a tricky business. The one urges reconciliation and the other agitates persuasively and passionately for forgiveness. Both get maximum media exposure, by virtue of their positions and stature, so that their hegemony is strengthened daily. Their combined moral stature is enormous, not only within South Africa but in the whole wide world. What, then, can anyone say or do in the face of leaders of such depth and stature? The danger is there their hard-earned moral stature may be disempowering to the rest of the nation. Even the powerful liberal media of South Africa has been forced back by the moral stature of our current crop of leaders. Somehow, we need to find a way of breaking the spell without undermining the stature of our leaders. Churches must break the spell sooner rather than later. The quality of the lives of South Africans, especially the poorest of the poor, is far more important than political and cultural politeness. We must take heed of the analysis of Ngugi Wa Thiongo (1993:151) on what went wrong in independent Kenya:

In 1962, Jomo Kenyatta was released from eight years in prison, and he proceeded to negotiate away everything that the Mau Mau armed struggle had fought for. Colonial structures were left intact, and today Kenya under successor Daniel Arap Moi is one of the most repressive states in the world . . . Kenyatta lost on the negotiating table what had already been won on the battlefield by the Kenyan people. Black South Africa cannot accept, or indeed afford, the replacement of the 1910 neo-colonial arrangement under white-minority supervision by a 1990s refined neo-colonialist arrangement to be run by a black minority.

Keeping Commitment and Solidarity Focused on the Struggle of the Poor

I have argued elsewhere (Maluleke, 1996, 1997a, 1997b) that part of the deficit of present-day theology in South Africa is the inability to connect meaningfully to Black and African Theologies. If ever there was a time when we needed Black and African Theology, it is now. The other theologies have proven themselves incapable of exploring and articulating either the continuing *silences* or the *silencings* of the poor and the black people, especially black women. What we need now in South Africa is not simply more Christian theology; apartheid *was* Christian theology. Whereas South African Christian theology was represented by what Kairos theologians have called church and state theology, Black and African Theology were driven by the quests and struggles of black people for cultural, political, spiritual, economic and ecclesial self-determination. South African Black theologians have in agreement with other liberation theologians often declared that the liberation of oppressed people is far more important than questions of Christian orthodoxy. This is how seriously the poor and the oppressed were regarded in those theologies. The implications of placing the struggles of poor black people at

the centre of the theological task are significant. In such an enterprise, our criteria, strategies, and methodologies will be governed by the demands, ethics, symbols, and strategies of the struggles of the poor.

The New South Africa and its mostly superficial search for racial and cultural harmony will cease to be the standard by which we measure things or the source from which we construct our criteria. In other words, the New South Africa must cease to be both a referee and player at the same time. How can the New South Africa be constructed and evaluated on the basis of its own ambiguous, unknown principles? Our criteria must be derived from elsewhere the struggle of the black poor a struggle whose aim is to liberate all. In other words, the basic question to ask whether the topic is the TRC, Affirmative Action, Reconstruction, and Development, etc. is: to what extent does this enhance or disrupt the struggles of the oppressed? To what extent does the TRC process as it is currently unfolding advance or frustrate the aims of that struggle? This is the question South African Black Theologians have posed of Christianity itself and of themselves as theologians. The basic question we raise of the TRC process is the same. We should not ask a New South Africa question, such as whether it is contributing to national unity and racial harmony, etc. We must ask what this process is doing to the growing masses of the poor.

Current Reparation Proposals

Recently, the TRC's Reparations and Rehabilitations Committee finally announced its proposals for reparation measures for the thousands of victims who made submissions. These are mere proposals, still to be debated in parliament sometime next year. The announced reparations strategy encompasses five categories: urgent need grants, annual pension-type grants of between R17 000 and R23 000, symbolic reparations, community reparations, and institutional-reform reparations. It is estimated that these will cost about 3 billion Rands about 0.25% of the South African annual budget. It is perhaps instructive that what a victim will receive in an annual payout is less than what a commissioner now earns per month. Also, many of the perpetrators applying for amnesty have already received their golden handshakes from the government. A few victims' organisations and representatives have said that there was little consultation with the victims about the type and amount of reparations. Questions raised about the quantity and quality of reparations are often answered with the suggestion that no amount of money can make up for the suffering of victims. One wishes that this argument would also be used with respect to the general financial cost of the TRC and its own gravy train (Mda, 1997b), otherwise one detects a double standard.

Concluding Thoughts

There is a sense in which healing and reconciliation are such crucial processes for us in this country that we cannot leave the job in the hands of a small, temporary and

ambiguous commission. The healing and the reconciling of South Africans is much bigger than the commission, its frameworks and operational assumptions. It is about more than story-telling and amnesty. We therefore first have to explore, analyse and combat the emerging theological paradigm the theology of reconciliation under which the TRC is now operating. Unless we are vigilant, there is a real danger that the current TRC process may deal rather lightly with the deep wounds of God's people.

CHAPTER 20

Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements in Modern Africa

Matthews A. Ojo

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in Africa since their emergence in the early 1970s, discussing the growth, characteristics and dynamics of the movements with emphasis on aspects of their doctrines and practices. We also reflect on Pentecostal and Charismatic movements as change-agents, and discuss their responses to religious and socio-political problems of the African contemporary society, drawing from existing literature and field work I have done since the 1980s.

Since the early 1970s, a new religious phenomenon emerged and began to sweep across the African continent. Initially as a reformist movement that championed a new spirituality and a deeper understanding of Christianity that was redemptive and progressive, this explosion of Christianity was at first identified with certain youths who labeled themselves as pastors and evangelists although they lacked pastoral and theological training. Their proselytizing activities were remarkable and daring, calling on other Christians to repentance from all kinds of evil associations. “Are you born again?” or “You must be born again” was a common way they approached their listeners. Although it was based on the old evangelical tradition of conversion, it had newness because this proselytization was carried out even in public places. The young puritan style preachers also prayed for deliverance from every kind of malevolent spiritual forces. They promoted their new evangelism through literature, crusades, camp meetings, “Fire or Holy Ghost or Power” conferences, “Holy Ghost Nights,” and healing and deliverance services. They also advertised on conspicuous sign boards in the cities and utilized the media and emerging media technologies to promote themselves and enlist members. By the mid-1980s, the new phenomenon had been institutionalized in neo-independent churches mostly called “ministries” or “fellowships,” or evangelistic associations or churches. By the late 1980s, in addition to advertisements in print and

electronic media, the novelty of their message gave them social prominence. Moreover, unlike the existing African Independent Churches whose growth had atrophied by the 1960s, the new movements continued to grow and spread widely into the new millennium, and were considered by observers as a substantial Christian awakening and innovation in the continent.

Scholars have used different and sometimes confusing terms to refer to this movement in the continent. Some of the names used are: "Neo-Pentecostal," "Born Again," Evangelical, Fundamentalist, and Charismatic. Two labels are however popular and widely used. First, the term, "Pentecostal movements" has been used to encompass both the classical forms of Pentecostalism traced to the early twentieth century, and the newer trans-denominational evangelical activities of the 1970s largely promoted by young people. Other scholars have restricted the term "Charismatic movements" to the newer movements of the 1970s and have thus distinguished them from the classical groups. In this essay I use the term "Pentecostal and Charismatic movements" as an umbrella term to describe both the classical and the new forms of Pentecostalism, and "Charismatic movements" to refer to the newer movements that emerged from the 1970s.

Pentecostalism, associated with Christianity since the second century, became a global phenomenon in the early twentieth century and organized into new denominations within its first twenty years in the United States. Its modern roots are traced to independent revival services organized by the black holiness preacher, William Seymour, at Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1900 out of which came the Apostolic Faith Mission, Foursquare Gospel Church, Assemblies of God, and other smaller denominations. In the 1960s, Pentecostal spirituality penetrated some mainline Protestant churches when some evangelical Christians claimed the Pentecostal experience of baptism of the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking in tongues.¹ This latter Pentecostal outpouring is referred to as the Charismatic Renewal, and the resulting independent groups as the Charismatic movements.

Allan Anderson (2004:24) has remarked that members give primacy to the experience of the Holy Spirit and charismatic gifts as central to Pentecostal spirituality. Pentecostal emphasis on spiritual empowerment has become tools for a new orientation to life and for building a new community. Both Pentecostals and Charismatics believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, as foundational experience. They also lay emphasis on healing and miracles as manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Charismatics are trans-denominational and more ecumenical in their expression than the Pentecostals, who often come from the classical Pentecostal denominations such as Apostolic Faith Mission, Assemblies of God, Foursquare Gospel Church, The Apostolic Church, etc. Since the 1980s, some Charismatic groups in Africa have become independent, and some have indeed merged into the same denominational categories of Pentecostal churches, despite their claims in the 1970s that they were not establishing new churches. Generally, these churches are still led by solitary figures who are founders and general overseers, who have built up mega churches, and who exercised authority over their organizations as personal empires without recourse to any constitutional framework.

Pentecostal and Charismatic movements are the fastest growing religious endeavor in Africa. From about thirty independent Charismatic organizations in the mid-1970s

in Nigeria, Ghana, and Malawi, there were over ten thousand groups across the continent by 2000. There were about 8 million members in Nigeria, about 2 million in Ghana; about half a million in Cameroon and Cote d'Ivoire, and about 300,000 each in Benin and Burkina Faso, about 150,000 in Togo, and about 2,000 in Niger Republic. In southern Africa, the Pentecostal and Charismatic have a great impact on the demographic and social importance of the indigenous Pentecostal churches like the Zionist. Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have grown rapidly in Africa because of their modernizing tendencies and strategies, and their pragmatic approach to social and religious issues affecting millions within the disruptive socio-economic and political climate in Africa since the late 1970s. These churches used healing to counter difficulties and malevolent spiritual forces, and emphasized the empowerment of believers for upward social mobility in a competitive capitalist environment. These emphases form a continuation with traditional cosmology of evil in the African society. Generally, Pentecostalism is a new cultural product designed in response to individual, group, and social needs in contemporary Africa; hence, it seems to have a built-in capacity to adapt without wreaking havoc on its ideology and identities. Some scholars have argued that economic deterioration in many African countries from the 1980s that created socio-political upheavals led to the proliferation of Pentecostal and Charismatic groups. However, Ogbu Kalu (2008:4) has argued that Africans have always been attracted to the charismatic and pneumatic elements of the gospel because these resonate with the goals and practices of traditional religion.

Pentecostal Historiography

Historical and anthropological studies of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have pointed out the complexities of these movements in different countries. Early studies focused on the social and demographic changes of the 1970s that gave a fillip to the growth and expansion of Pentecostal groups and churches as new religious expressions. Ojo (1988a, 1988b) examines the historical roots and growth of Charismatic movements in Nigeria from the 1970s, while Ruth Marshall (1992, 2009) sketches a political framework for understanding the networks, organizational structures and the doctrinal emphases of the movements. Gifford (1992) presents the growth of Charismatic movements in several countries in one edited volume. Maxwell (1999) discusses the origins of Southern African Pentecostal movements from their classical roots at the beginning of the twentieth century to their indigenization in the 1960s. Early accounts of South African Pentecostal movements also show its trans-denominational and multi-racial characters. Van Dijk (1992) documents the development of Charismatic movements in Malawi from the mid-1970s.

Comparative studies include Gifford (1994), which describes the major Charismatic organizations in Ghana and examines nuanced experiences across Africa. Recently, Gifford (1998) further examines the growth of Charismatic movements in Ghana and Africa within socio-economic and political contexts. Larbi (1998) traces the historical development of the movements in Ghana from indigenous roots in the early twentieth century to the contemporary manifestations in the Charismatic movements.

Asamoah-Gyadu (2005) provides a theological examination of the doctrinal emphases and practices of the movements in Ghana, while Omenyo (2002) and Ihejirika (2006) show how Charismatic groups fare within mainline Protestant and Catholic churches in Ghana and Nigeria respectively.

Thematic studies includes Birgit Meyer (1992, 2002, 2003), who examines the construction of a cosmology of power in modern Ghanaian Pentecostalism and its use of popular media. Marshall-Fratani and Corten (2001) examine Pentecostal movements in the context of trans-nationalism and globalization, while Ojo (1997, 2005) discusses the evangelistic and missionary activities of the Charismatic movements and their implications for the trans-nationalization of Charismatic Renewal in Africa. Hackett (1998) analyzes the appropriation of media technology by Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in Nigeria and Ghana. Furthermore, Ukah (2008) details how the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria has deployed Biblical and secular doctrines to create new transnational identities and, hence, create huge social and financial capital. On a broader scale, Kalu (2008) re-interprets Pentecostal movements in Africa from an African cultural perspective. Regional analysis has been provided by Allan Anderson, Van Dijk, Karla Poewe, David Maxwell, Asonzeh Ukah, Musa Gaiya, and others.

Two approaches have been apparent in the literature. First, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity is described as a new period in the history of African “primal” religion and, second, as a part of the history of worldwide Christianity. Since the 1990s, some western scholars have linked the vibrancy of Charismatic movements in Africa to American influence. It is rather impossible to explore the arguments for and against the external influence in details in this chapter; however it is pertinent to note that traditional African cosmology of evil and healing are central to the beliefs of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in Africa.

Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements in the History of African Christianity

The Pentecostal and Charismatic movements represent a new and important strand of African Christianity that is structurally different from the African Initiated Churches or Independent Churches that emerged in the late nineteenth century. African Christianity before the mid-twentieth century was greatly shaped by the sustained denominational missionary activities of the mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, which began in the early nineteenth century. Aided by European economic expansionism, missionaries swamped Africa, and by the late nineteenth century Christianity was firmly established in many parts of Africa. Missionary evangelization and education stimulated many socio-political processes with far-reaching consequences among which was secessions from the mission churches leading to the founding of the Ethiopian or African churches (Webster, 1964; Welbourn, 1961).

In the second decade of the twentieth century, African Independent Churches, such as Aladura churches in Nigeria, Spiritual churches in Ghana, Harrist churches in Cote d'Ivoire, and Zionist and messianic churches in Southern Africa, emerged in different

parts of the continent (Sundkler, 1961). The new churches witnessed tremendous growth because they emphasized healing and prophetic activity. These independent churches represented Christianity at the grass roots (Turner, 1967; Barrett, 1968; MacGaffey, 1983). As the growth of the African Independent Churches peaked in the 1950s, foreign Pentecostal churches became more visible, though in Southern Africa they had been active from the first decade (Maxwell, 1999a; Anderson and Pillay, 1997).

Charismatic movements in Nigeria emerged from revivals in the 1970s among evangelical Christian students in the University of Ibadan and University of Ife. Intensive Bible study, prayer sessions, and a quest for a new experience brought them into contact with Pentecostal spirituality, which had existed since the 1940s but was confined to the classical Pentecostal churches. The students were attracted to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and they later stimulated evangelistic activities to spread their new religious experience. The students were not deterred by criticism from the other students in the existing evangelical student organizations—the Christian Union and Scripture Union, whose origin could be traced to the activities of expatriate teachers from England in the 1950s and 1960s.² Eventually, the Nigerian movements were instrumental in stimulating Charismatic renewal across West Africa as Nigerians interacted with others in various fora (Ojo, 1995, 2006).

In East Africa, evangelical students in Kenya and Uganda facilitated the spread of the Charismatic Renewal across borders. A training course with emphases on evangelism and Bible study held in Kenya in June 1974 and attended by students from other countries marked the beginning of a new Christian awareness. Memories of the Balokole and earlier revival in East Africa, and the Holy Spirit movement in some mainline churches in Kenya with far-reaching religious and social impact, promoted Charismatic Renewal (Anderson, 1977: 163–170). Van Dijk (1992) reported that the first news coverage of young preachers in Malawi was in June 1974, the same period that the fervency of this new evangelism was taken up by young people in other parts of Africa. Although in the 1970s there was a gap between the evangelicals and Charismatics among the young people in educational institutions, eventually the gap narrowed and the differences disappeared as the enthusiasm for the Pentecostal spirituality spread in the 1980s.

Charismatic Renewal progressed as an indigenous initiative until the mid-1970s when American Pentecostal literature and evangelistic visits of American televangelists introduced the “church planting” and “mega church” concepts. From that period, size became an index of success. In fact, American Christian tracts provided the first corpus of literature for African Charismatics. The open air evangelistic meetings and residential camp meetings of three to five days were popularized at this time. Links were eventually established among African Charismatic organizations and their American counterparts.

African Charismatic movements expanded to Europe and North America from the early 1980s because of increasing migration of Africans to the western world. For example, in Germany at the turn of the twenty-first century, there were over 1,000 churches of migrant communities, and over 200 of these were founded by Africans. In England, there was a rapid rise from less than a hundred churches in the 1980s to over

a thousand by the late 1990s. Confronted by the secularization of the western society and the decline of church attendance and public piety, these migrants took up a revivalist agenda, establishing mostly Charismatic churches that sought to evangelize westerners. In Kiev, Ukraine, the Embassy of God Church established in 1993 by the Nigerian, Sunday Adelaja, has grown in 2006 to about 25,000 members of which 99% are native Europeans. In addition, it has over 100 satellite churches in Eastern Europe, India, and United Arab Emirates. Its television program reaches millions across Europe.³ There is also the Kingsway International Christian Centre founded in 1992 by Matthew Ashimolowo, a Nigerian pastor. By 1995, the church has grown to about 6,000 members, to become the largest Protestant church in England. The church has a ministry to sex workers, drug addicts, and the homeless in London, and it uses the print and electronic media to publicize its programmes. In the late 1990s, it established branches in Ghana and Nigeria, where the church has already had a successful television broadcast. These cases clearly indicate how African Charismatic groups can transcend their African origins and enter new cultural milieus.

Some western scholars view African Pentecostal and Charismatic movements as an offshoot of American Pentecostalism or as a derivative of American capitalist and corporate culture. However, Ogbu Kalu (2000:104) has argued that Nigerian Pentecostalism “is not an offshoot of Azusa Street revival or an extension of American electronic church or a creation of televangelists. It has a certain uniqueness which could best be understood from its fit in African primal worldview . . . Its problems and idioms are sourced from the interior of African spirituality.” Likewise, Anderson and Pillay (1997:229) note that “after about 1910 . . . North American Pentecostalism had no further influence on the progress of Pentecostalism in South Africa.” These assertions support my earlier views (Ojo, 2006b) that the interconnections between American Pentecostalism and their African counterparts do not automatically indicate that they share the same ideological roots because Christianity as a world religion shares certain features in common across cultures and boundaries. Therefore, to argue that religious influences flow only in one direction, North to South or West to East is to ignore local factors that have given impetus to the rise and have shaped Pentecostalism in Africa. While interconnections and networking have increased in the global context, and while Africans sometimes look to the west for material assistance, the indigenous origin of these movements and the role of African pioneers must not be neglected.

Social Imperatives of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements

Pentecostal and Charismatic movements are proliferating in Africa, and in a wide range of types and sizes in many countries. They continue to utilize media and communication technologies to repackage a new spirituality. Consequently, they reconstruct religious life and landscape through specific missionary strategies and ethics. They are purveyors of modern culture, using modern musical instruments, video, satellite broadcasting, and the Internet. Hence, their sermons, healing and miracle services, breakthrough programs, and advertisement of conventions and special programs often dominate the airwaves providing huge and easy revenue to many cash-strapped radio and television stations. Moreover, the use of literature—printed magazines, tracts,

booklets, etc.—has aided the wider dissemination of Pentecostal spirituality across Africa. Unlike the African Independent Churches, Charismatic organizations purposely claim their movements are international.

Uniquely modern, shrewd, imbued with a can-do mentality, market-oriented, success-directed, and charismatic in style, with ever-growing multi-ethnic congregations principally using English as a medium of communication, Pentecostal and Charismatic movements propagate their doctrines to millions who live in urban areas. In West Africa, membership includes the educated middle class—those people fluent in the English language who have access to the global world of the media and its products. However, in Southern Africa, Pentecostal and Charismatic movements attracted largely the marginalized and disfranchized urban poor, except in the white dominated churches such as Ray McCauley's Rhema Bible Church in Johannesburg and Edmund Roebert's Hatfield Christian Church in Pretoria that boast of some substantial white and black middle class members. But increasingly the Pentecostal message appears to have crossed social class boundaries, drawing to it large numbers of the middle class and urban poor such as wage-earners, artisans, and the unemployed as well as rural dwellers from across the social spectrum. Many pastors and church founders of the Pentecostal and Charismatic organizations in West Africa have degrees and a few have doctoral degrees; and several of them have used their knowledge to create global network for evangelism and expansion. Many women have been attracted to the services of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements partly because the domestication of the messages and the emphasis on the paradigm of spiritual equality has enhanced the role and status of women.

By the 1990s Charismatic movements achieved social respectability as the political elite began to identify themselves with Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. The politicians did this to garner grassroots support and seek legitimacy in a context where politicians had a poor governance record. The first politician to do this, President Frederick Chiluba of Zambia declared Zambia a Christian nation in December 1991 and drew Pentecostals unto himself and into the political sphere. In Ghana, President J. J. Rawlings moved closer to the Charismatics in the 1990s and received their religious and moral legitimacy to his government. In Benin Republic, Mathieu Kerekou converted from Marxism to Pentecostalism and came back into the political arena. In Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo consistently favored the Pentecostal environment, and consistently appealed to Christian sentiments and has attended or sent representatives to major events organized by Pentecostals. In December 2003 Obasanjo made a much-advertised personal visit to Lagos to the *Holy Ghost Festival* of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, a leading Nigerian Pentecostal church. Despite the failure of the centralized state, religion, particularly Pentecostalism, has continued to soar as it presents itself as a politically relevant and an alternative social institution. It is therefore pertinent to examine the factors for the wide appeal of Pentecostalism in Africa, and its praxis within the political sphere.

Early leaders of the movements initially claimed that they only existed to provide avenues for Bible studies, evangelism, and prayer meetings to Christians who would use that strengthening to renew their own churches. This changed when groups consolidated as churches; the quest for leadership opportunities, personal ambition, opposition from the established churches, the need for pastoral care for converts, and

territorial expansion fuelled growth. Thus, by the 1980s some Charismatic organizations initiated their own regular Sunday worship services, erected permanent places of worship, inaugurated administrative structures, built up permanent membership, and accepted trained and paid clergy. Actually, the economic difficulties in Africa from the late 1980s demanded the management of scarce resources in the new churches that were created.

Pentecostal messages shifted from spiritual regeneration, baptism of the Holy Spirit and healing, to miracles, deliverance, and prosperity as paradigms for personal empowerment. To a large extent, these changes were conditioned by socio-economic changes in society. Instead of total rejection of secular values, some began to be involved in social and political issues in order to gain relevance. As they routinized from the late 1980s, independent Charismatic groups, which were originally sectarian and promoted a strict holiness ethos on the fringe of the society, moved to the center stage and their pietistic energy dissipated. In fact, the millennial belief of Christ second coming and judgment of the 1970s had by early 1990s given way to this-worldly concerns for wealth and power.

Regional Differences in the French-Speaking and English-Speaking West African Countries

Despite the phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism, there are differences across the continent. Growth in the Francophone West African countries has moved at a slower pace compared to similar movements in Anglophone countries. This is due to different socio-political experiences during colonial rule that passed on to the postcolonial state. Political decentralization in Nigeria and Ghana, for example, has fostered religious creativity as a cultural phenomenon, whereas the centralized unitary systems in the French-speaking and Lusophone countries have created religious uniformity and governmental supervision that requires religious organizations to register or have Presidential permissions before they operate openly—requirements that are sometimes left to the whims and caprices of the bureaucrats and the Minister of Interior Affairs or Minister for Territorial Administration.

The Communauté Missionnaire Chrétienne Internationale with headquarters in Yaoundé, Cameroon, the first independent Charismatic organization in Cameroon, faced obstacles in registering their community. Its founder, Zacharias Tanee Fomum, was, until his death after a long-lasting fast in June 2009, a professor of Chemistry in the University of Yaoundé since completing his doctoral studies at Makerere University in the late 1970s. He started with a small discipleship group, which was initially affiliated with the Full Gospel Mission: the first registered Pentecostal church in the country. Fomum published regularly and enhanced the expansion of Pentecostalism. In 1985, Fomum severed relationship with the Full Gospel Mission and attempted to organize a new independent Pentecostal group but was denied registration by the government. Unable to operate openly, the group went underground as house groups/churches. By the early 1990s, hundreds of these house groups have been

established in Yaoundé, the country's capital, to the embarrassment of the political authorities. Eventually, about 1992, a presidential decree granted recognition to the church.⁴ With the new status, Fomum expanded his church to different parts of the country and to other West African countries, which he achieved majorly through evangelistic activities and an effective literature ministry. While Fomum's emphasis on holiness and prayers were considered rigorous and separatist, his numerous pamphlets and tracts distributed freely to other West African countries created a large followership and brought rapid growth to his church. For the first time in a Francophone country, Fomum brought Pentecostalism into a new limelight as a religion, not only for the deprived and the poor but also the educated elite.

Nigerian Pentecostals took their vision to other West African countries in the 1980s, and these Pentecostal evangelists flouted government regulations and established small Pentecostal groups that met informally, thus creating precedence for nationals of some Francophone countries to challenge the various restrictions of their government. While the liberalization of the electronic and print media in Anglophone countries in the new millennium favored a healthy contest for public space by religious organizations, the media in Francophone countries still faced government restrictions. Whereas graduates and university teachers are in the forefront of the Charismatic movements in the Anglophone countries, this phenomenon is not apparent in the Francophone and Lusophone countries. Educational institutions in Anglophone countries steeped in the colonial and missionary legacies of religious education have sustained religious creativity as opposed to Francophone countries whose educational institutions have been cultivated in the liberal and philosophical traditions of the French educational system. The few graduates in Francophone institutions who are Charismatic leaders, interestingly, have had contacts with the English-speaking countries in one way or the other.

Much more interesting is the fact that while political leaders in the Anglophone countries have tried to identify with the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, the opposite has been the case in the Francophone countries; an uneasiness attributable to many factors. First, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches challenged the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church in a context where most political leaders have been either Roman Catholics or had been trained in Catholic schools. Also Protestant churches have closely allied to the political elite in order to survive and be relevant on social development programs that are heavily funded from foreign agencies. Consequently, evangelistic activities of Pentecostals were considered as a threat to the continuing relevance of the Catholic and Protestant churches because it created alternative centres of powers. Pentecostal teaching of empowerment through the Holy Spirit sustained a certain degree of anti-clericalism and promoted self-reliance. Besides, the doctrinal emphases on born again and holiness had the political implication of being indirectly anti-church and anti-establishment by creating a substitute moral community in the public sphere which strongly challenged the endemic corruption and ineptness in the political sphere. Lastly, Pentecostalism with diverse impetus from home and abroad, and its appeal to the grassroots, certainly conflicted with the centralization of the governments and political parties in the Francophone countries. Despite these regional differences, Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in the West African region share the same doctrinal emphases, practices and social structures.

Typology of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements in Nigeria

Charismatic organizations are of interesting variety; some are large, while some are small. Some have fossilized without any impact, while new ones like the Deeper Life Bible Church, Redeemed Christian Church of God, and the Mountain of Fire and Miracles ministries—all founded in Lagos, Nigeria, have used the media and achieved social prominence since the 1990s. It is rather strange to put under the same umbrella groups that emphasize strict holiness ethos and are therefore world-rejecting with those that have this-worldly concern. Each has its uniqueness and often appeal to different classes of people. I have earlier in my other writings attempted a typology of the Charismatic movements in order to simplify the complexity of the movements and untangle the religious labyrinths. Using the paradigm of power and piety as the analytical tool, I argue that Pentecostal and Charismatic movements can be distinguished into six categories according to their perceptions of how they believe the world and individuals would be redeemed from the malevolent forces and consequently have dominion over the world.

First, the *faith seekers* are conversionist and they manifest this attitude with vigorous evangelistic activities directed at the individual. They insist that the individual has to undergo certain experiences that will transform his or her egoistic outlook to one that acknowledges a creator God and his plan of redemption for the world. Socially and economically, they are generally ascetic and often distance themselves from the values of the secular society. Second, the *faith builders* emphasize that humans have the potentials to overcome contemporary difficulties of life by exercising their faith productively. Many of these groups are in urban centres and draw membership from the mobile educated middle class who seek rapid social mobility, material comforts, and societal recognition. Faith builders strive to harness individual potential which they also claim are divine gifts. They believe that Christians as spiritual beings must have wealth and abundance and shun poverty and deprivation to experience the power to transform the society. Material success could be measured by acquisition of big cars, nice clothing, and fat bank accounts. They tend to accept the values of the secular society, though certain aspects of their doctrinal emphases tend to regulate the “ethical” ways of acquiring wealth and achieving success.

The third group is the *faith transformers* who resemble the conversionists but are more concerned with seeking the conversion of large and isolated ethnic groups rather than individuals. They are traditionally the mission-sending agencies sending full-time missionaries to work among “tribal” peoples. They are also ascetic largely because they lack any viable economic base and support for the demanding task of missions. Certain feelings of heroism keep them going. Fourthly, the *Reformists* are those who have been influenced by Pentecostal spirituality and are found within the mainline Protestant denominations and in the Catholic Church and who want to remain as members but are seeking renewal of these churches according to their own self-defined religious values. They are literalists who see their denominations as their religious inheritance which must be improved upon. They also see their activities in their churches as God-ordained. Since the mid-1980s, their activities in the Anglican Churches have been noticed in the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion (EFAC) and in the

Roman Catholic Church as the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and similarly in other denominations. Socially, they are characterized as second or third generation of Christians in these churches, middle class and mostly educated and who have shared in the Charismatic Renewal on the campuses.

Fifthly, *the Deliverance churches* are a recent trend in African Pentecostalism. They emphasize healing and function like “forensic experts” who argue that past African cultural roots are responsible for the contemporary dislocation in the lives of individuals and the society as a whole. They often associate some traditional names with evil. They also believe in “genealogical curses” that prevent human progress, and prescribe a total break with the ancestral roots through rituals which include saying certain prayers, disconnection from one’s cultural roots, and even changing one’s names, etc. Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, now spreading to African countries is a good example. Lastly, *the Modernists* are members of the old African Independent Churches who believe that they have to present their faith in a modern acceptable form to a more enlightened society. Some have sympathy for Pentecostal spirituality or have shared in Pentecostal activities, and are mindful of the marketing success of the Charismatics, which they want to replicate in their own constituency. T.B. Joshua’s Synagogue Church of All Nations with headquarters in Lagos is also an example.

This typology generated from West Africa, and applicable to other African contexts, provides an analytical framework for in-depth enquiry and avoids generalization found in some existing literature on African Pentecostalism. More important, this typology further indicates that Pentecostalism in Africa displays a wide variety of focus and trajectories.

Doctrinal Emphases and Practices

The dominant doctrinal theme since the 1970s is healing, which some tried to incorporate into evangelistic activities in the 1980s. The importance of healing is observable in three ways. First, the founder-leaders of Charismatic organizations assert that they are “healers,” “miracle workers,” and operate churches where “God answers prayers.” Second, many published individual testimonies claim that they were healed of their sicknesses after attending programs and “the man of God” prayed for them. Pentecostals and Charismatics regularly organize healing and miracles services where people often claim spectacular healing in these services. Lastly, many Charismatic organizations use the media to advertise healing and miracles with captions like: “The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the oppressed will be set free, and the dead will rise.” Pentecostal churches use such advertising to increasingly attract people who seek employment, children, marriage partners, and relief from pain and distress.

Healing refers first to physical healing which is basic to all Pentecostal groups and forms the bulk of testimonies focusing on healing. The “crusades” i.e. open air evangelistic meetings and healing services have helped to popularize this kind of healing. Second, healing is constructed within the African worldview as relief from evil, witchcraft, and the world of spirits. Demonic attacks could cause bodily ill-health, and Pentecostals obtain healing when malevolent forces are cast out. This process is termed “Deliverance” which releases one from the curse of the past and empowers that person

to face the future. Thirdly, progressive Pentecostals stress success and prosperity, which is another form of healing over the socio-economic difficulties of the individual. Lastly, Pentecostals have extended their healing activities over the political and socio-economic conditions of a nation, which they strive to bring about through "Prayer for the Nations". These four spheres of healing are found in varying degrees among African Pentecostal and Charismatic organizations.

Charismatics understand healing literally and as a powerful metaphor to negotiate wider concerns in the contemporary situation. First, while concentrating on the Biblical symbols of illness and healing, Charismatics have employed healing to confront what they consider to be overwhelming evil within their society such as illness, failures of the political system in providing social services, socio-economic problems, and general dislocation created by successive totalitarian governments. Second, scholars have argued that healing is important to African Independent Churches partly because modern medicine reaches only a small portion of African population (Du Toit and Abdalla, 1985:1) and also because Africans often attribute illnesses to spiritual causes (H.W. Turner, 1967:149–55; J.D.Y. Peel, 1968:127–9, J.A. Omoyajowo, 1982:170–6, J.K. Olupona, 1987:51; D. Westerlund, 1989; M. Schoffeleers, 1991:1–25). Since the early 1980s, government health services in many African countries have been poorly funded, lacked drugs and qualified personnel, and there has been a gradual decline in the quality of services provided. Simultaneously, the cost of treatments in private hospitals is high and beyond the means of the average citizen. Therefore, the emphasis on healing responds to the needs and aspiration of many Africans.

The emphasis on Success and Prosperity surfaced in the mid-1980s in an attempt to enhance the quality of life and to empower the individual for achieving economic success in life. This new emphasis was first associated with Benson Idahosa (1939–1998), the founder of Church of God Mission Incorporated with head office in Benin City, Nigeria, who was the first evangelist to promote the prosperity gospel on a large scale among Pentecostals.⁵ He demonstrated the idea with his flamboyant lifestyle and emphasized the notion of "productive faith" and miracles. He used his television program, *Redemption Hour*, which was broadcast to a number of West African countries, to propagate the teaching on prosperity that he learned from his American mentors: T.L. Osborn, Oral Roberts, Gloria and Kenneth Copeland, and Gordon Lindsay. Against the trend in the society at that time, Idahosa preached that Christians ought to have access to material wealth and live life to the full. He insisted that members should not give coins as offerings but currency notes of high worth. One of his earliest books, *I Choose to Change*, provided elaboration on this emphasis.⁶ His televangelism and scholarship scheme trained many Africans at Idahosa's Bible School in Nigeria. Most returned to their countries with strong convictions about the prosperity gospel. Idahosa's teaching has had a long-lasting impact in Ghana because he trained the leading figures (founders and pastors) of major Charismatic churches such as Christian Action Faith Ministries International founded in 1979 and World Miracle Bible Church founded in 1983.

Although there are different perspectives on prosperity among Pentecostal preachers, generally they teach that God promises prosperity as an integral part of the covenant with Abraham, which is also extended to all Christians who accept the

scriptural truth. Failure, poverty, unhappiness, and all forms of difficulties are curses which should not be the lot of Christians. Secondly, material wealth is a necessary benefit of true spirituality. Thirdly, to be prosperous one must give generously, liberally, and sacrificially towards the course of the gospel, or “plant seed-money” or “seed of faith,” as some Charismatics say. Those who give more will receive blessings in abundance.⁷

Other preachers approach the subject by condemning poverty and highlighting its causes and remedies. If a Christian is poor, or has no material wealth this could be considered an illness that needs healing. This approach addresses poverty from a religious perspective rather than from a strictly economic perspective. Their spiritual remedies are published and advertised widely; preachers lead seminars and services to maximize one’s business potential and learn “How to get the Top in Life.”⁸

Paul Gifford has identified five ways Charismatic Christianity is thought to bring success. First, through motivation, i.e. “through a positive mental attitude”. Second, churches encourage members to become entrepreneurs. Third, they preach the faith gospel, arguing that one should exercise faith and obey the biblical idea of “sowing and reaping.” Hence, giving tithes and offerings to the pastor and the church will enhance one’s advancement. Fourth, success and prosperity come through the “anointing” of the pastor. Fifth, these pastors can exorcize the spirits that impede the Christian’s progress to wealth. Thus, many of these churches operate mainly through breaking spiritual obstacles.⁹

Scholars continue to show interest in the doctrine of prosperity which has contributed to the growth of Pentecostalism in Africa. Gifford (1990) considers the prosperity gospel an American export to Africa, while Birgit Meyer (1999:237–8) has argued that the obsession with wealth and power lies behind the views about the Devil in a capitalist economy articulated by Ghanaian Pentecostals. Recently, Gifford (2004) has noted that the emphasis on this-worldly success among Ghanaian Pentecostals is partly built on traditional religious imaginations and ties into modern capitalist economy. Asonzeh Ukah (2008:183–96) argues that Enoch Adeboye, the current leader of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria, incorporated prosperity into a church with a holiness ethos to address the social and economic difficulties members faced in 1980s. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (2005:201–2) and Kingsley Larbi (2002:99–119) have argued that Ghanaian Pentecostals and Charismatics interpret the prosperity gospel as flowing from the concept of salvation.

Overall, the emphasis on prosperity legitimizes the quest for materialism, power, and prestige sought by Africans since the 1980s. In emphasizing prosperity as a spiritual thing, Pentecostals have helped to lend new meanings to the quest for materialism condemned in the past by older evangelical Churches. Prebendal politics of the 1980s and widespread corruption elevated wealth to a major social index of worth and value and encouraged an emphasis on prosperity, which has afforded Pentecostals and Charismatics a means of responding to the economic conditions and social values around them. Pentecostal churches have moralized and provided situational justification for their quest for material wealth, just like others in the society. The miraculous wealth that one can get without any commensurate productive activities is also similar to the magic wealth that has become the dominant theme in contemporary home videos from Ghana and Nigeria.

Charismatics' doctrinal emphases have also centered on power—both in its literary and symbolic forms. Charismatics have evolved a unique militarization of popular speech. Images of invasion, conquest, destruction, evolving into “prayer missiles,” “fire and power conferences” are mixed with worn-out but still popular images of the grandiose: miracles, health, success, and wealth, which have been part of the religious imagination of those who are socially and economically marginalized in the society. Indeed, it is in the area of healing that Charismatics have succeeded greatly in domesticating power for practical application. “The power in the blood of Jesus,” as they have often said, can transform every situation and individuals.

The emphasis on miracles and healing reflects Charismatics' comprehension of the supernatural. To them, the supernatural realm can only be accessed through “power,” variously construed as the “power of prayer,” “Jesus' power,” “the power of God,” etc. Evangelistic programs are not merely evangelism, but “Power Crusade,” “Resurrection Power,” “Demolition Exercise,” “Breakthrough Explosion,” “Deliverance,” etc. as some captions of their posters, and the themes of the programs often read. Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries have a catalogue of “strategic prayers,” “militant prayers,” “dangerous prayers,” etc. which believers can use to assail against “enemies” and demonic forces. Its monthly prayer service tagged “power must change hands” on the grounds of “Prayer City” near Lagos wages constant battles against every kind of imaginary enemy. While adopting a different religious style, which is very modern, Charismatics have appropriated healing as a powerful metaphor and as an instrument of change.

This concern for power manifests radical continuity with the African worldview and underscores the idea that power can be harnessed through a religious platform. The “Holy Ghost power” is greater power than any other power. In terms of its social significance, it depicts Charismatics' capacity to accomplish things, to change life, characters, and situations. Such operation of power is a way of bringing theology to bear on the contemporary scene, and thus reorder the religious basis of the society.

Conclusion

Although Pentecostalism has become a global phenomenon, it has manifested a unique local favour in Africa as it tackles those existential issues important to Africans in all ages. Indeed, the religious emphases on healing, security, power, and the spirit world indicate continuity with traditional African cosmology. Overall, Pentecostal religious emphases have become symbols of change enhancing and transforming individual worldviews, relationships among groups, and promoting certain religious values such as progress, hope, success, etc. in the African society.

Notes

- 1 Richard A. Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976); Nils Bloch-Hoell, *The Pentecostal Movement* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), pp. 1–2 and Dennis J. Bennet, *Nine O'clock in the Morning* (Eastbourne, 1970).

- 2 Matthews A. Ojo, *The End-Time Army: Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2006), pp. 23–31.
- 3 J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “An African Pentecostal On Mission in Eastern Europe: The Church of the ‘Embassy of God’ in the Ukraine” *Pneuma*, Vol. 27, No 2 (2005), pp. 297–321. See also Embassy of God Church, *Look What the Lord Has Done* (Kyiv, 2005), pp. 44–5.
- 4 Facts obtained during fieldwork in Cameroon in late 2002.
- 5 For more on Benson Idahosa see Matthews A. Ojo, “Nigerian Pentecostalism and Transnational Religious Networks in West African Coastal Region,” in *Entreprises Religieuses Transnationales en Afrique de l’Ouest*, edited by Laurent Fourchard, André Mary, and Rene Otayek (Paris: Editions Karthala & Ibadan: IFRA, 2005), pp. 395–415.
- 6 Benson Idahosa, *I Choose to Change: The Scriptural Way to Success and Prosperity* (Crowborough, UK: Highland Books, 1987), p. 9 & p. 14.
- 7 Many of the Pentecostal pastors in their publications promote this view.
- 8 Text of a handbill issued by Christ Way Fellowship, Ile-Ife, Nigeria on 28 June, 1990.
- 9 Paul Gifford, “The Future of Christianity,” Inaugural Lecture read at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 4 June 2007.

CHAPTER 21

African Initiated Churches in the Diaspora

Afe Adogame

Introduction

In a fast globalizing era, significant religious transformations and transplantations yield a systematic re-sketching of the religious maps of the universe. Christianity is experiencing the globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. Recent demographic statistics from the Pew Forum survey on Pentecostalism,¹ Jenkin's *Next Christendom*,² and Barrett's et. al. *World Christian Encyclopedia*³ point lucidly to the shifting of Christianity's centre of gravity from the North to the South. Unequivocally, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity have emerged as key players on the stage of world Christianity. Phrases such as "Pentecostal power",⁴ "a religion made to travel"⁵ illustrate Pentecostal dynamism today. However, demographic figures in existing publications may be contested and categories like Pentecostal or Charismatic out of context may be confusing. The fact that Pew Forum uses the concept "renewalist" as an umbrella term for Pentecostals and Charismatics calls attention to the complexity of understanding the movements. However, as the survey aptly indicates, "By all accounts, Pentecostalism, and related charismatic movements represent one of the fastest-growing segments of global Christianity. At least a quarter of the world's 2 billion Christians are thought to be members of these lively, highly personal faiths, which emphasize such spiritually renewing 'gifts of the Holy Spirit' as speaking in tongues, divine healing and prophesying"⁶ This survey also analyzes the religious demography of 10 countries including Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa, demonstrating how Africa, Asia, and Latin America are becoming significant global players in the appropriation and dramatization Christianity. Nevertheless, one unresolved question that rages on in academic discourses on Pentecostalism concerns the provenance and texture of these new forms of religiosity; whether the emerging phenomenon in the South is homegrown and/or to what extent it is linked to external impulses.

This chapter tackles two interrelated issues: First, some scholars have canvassed that African churches face financial crisis because African economies have collapsed; consequently, the continent has turned to a new form of Christianity that is fundamentalist, and depends on American and foreign resources, personnel, and technology to dominate the African religious landscape. Second, such scholars even claim the “prosperity gospel” is a hiccup and by-product of American Pentecostalism who have made “health” and “wealth” central discourses in African Pentecostal rhetoric, despite the economic and political crisis Africans face. The main thrust of this argument is that Pentecostal Christianity evolving in Africa is not a genuine African phenomenon, arising from African experience and meeting African needs. The most visible proponents of this argument are Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose.⁷

According to Gifford, “For all the talk within African church circles of localization, inculturation, Africanization, or indigenization, external links have become more important than ever. Through these links the churches have become a major, if not the greatest single, source of development assistance, money, employment, and opportunity in Africa.”⁸ Earlier, Gifford asserts controversially “Africa’s current evangelical revival is directed from the US, and US evangelicalism is made up of two really distinct streams, Pentecostalism, and fundamentalism.”⁹ Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose corroborate this view, as they claimed, “A new kind of Christian fundamentalism once thought to be unique to the US, is spreading across the globe . . . While the leaders of the new Christian faith comes from various nations, the message is predominantly American.”¹⁰ Even though Gifford made a clear-cut, radical distinction between fundamentalism and Pentecostalism, he and others like Rijk van Dijk have confusedly described the Pentecostal developments in Africa in terms of Christian fundamentalism.¹¹

This paper offers a critique of this argument and challenges ideas which privilege “ecclesiastical externality” and “extraversion” in explaining the public role and demographic stature of African Christianity, mainly by claiming that recent trends in African Christianity are packaged in the US, sealed and delivered to Africa. Such assumptions fail to take due cognizance of the colossal diversity and complexity of African Christianity, and thus gloss over indigenous religious creativity and innovation. We contend that internal church dynamics; the import, prevalence, and packaging of healing ritual attitudes and actions account largely for the rapid expansion of Pentecostal Christianity in a way that is significantly reshaping local and global religious maps of the universe. The paper foregrounds the Malachi rhetoric as a vital anchor on which the economic base of most African Pentecostal churches revolves. Drawing from recent religious ethnography, the paper explores how internal religious characteristics and self-financing dynamics and strategies act as significant stimuli for Pentecostal growth and demographic spread in Africa and in the diaspora, in ways that reconfigure the global religious economy.

In exploring the complex articulation between Pentecostalism and globalization, Droogers challenges the prioritization of external factors in explaining Pentecostalism, a tendency where the specific characteristics of Pentecostalism are rarely sought.¹² He argues that explanation of the expansion of these religions should start with the specific local influences and proceed to external influences and social processes. African Pentecostalism exhibits local roots and diversity that must be taken into account when

assessing its nature, practice, vitality, and impact. We recognize that some “born-again” churches depend largely or partially on external funding (for example, the influence of from the American Bible belt), examples abound of Pentecostal movements in Nigeria and other African countries that are self-financing and self innovative. Some of these movements are even very conscious of external influences and its implications.

African Pentecostalism has stressed “health” and “wealth.” As Gifford’s title suggests in his essay “Prosperity: A New and Foreign Element in African Christianity,” prosperity was a new and foreign element in African Christianity brought by US evangelical revivals sweeping Africa.¹³ Gifford indicates: “the essential point of this Gospel of Prosperity is that prosperity of all kinds is the right of every Christian. God wants a Christian to be wealthy. True Christianity necessarily means wealth; it inevitably brings wealth. Conversely, poverty indicates personal sin, or at least a deficient faith or inadequate understanding.”¹⁴ As he further argues, “This Gospel of Prosperity does not belong in Africa’s revival. It did not originate in Africa. It originated with the media evangelists of the US . . . The fact that it is so commonly preached in Africa shows the degree to which this current revival is directed from the USA . . . [it] is spreading because of these (African) evangelists’ attention to and investment in all areas of the media.”¹⁵ Furthermore, Gifford situates the receptive response of Black Africa to the gospel of prosperity in the attraction to material wealth by Africa’s poor, Africa’s debt crisis, and the consequent lack of hard currency.¹⁶ He maintains that the gospel of prosperity suited white Christians of South Africa and Zimbabwe perfectly and drew a large following because of its socio-political implications. By this, he means that the gospel of prosperity became a sign of the true Christian by insisting that disproportionate wealth is nothing to be guilty about and offering assurance that wealth is one’s due and has nothing to do with the unjust structures that Tutu, Hurley, Boesak, and Naude continually confronted white churches with.¹⁷

This argument is superficial and one-sided and we will look at the case of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), to revisit the “prosperity gospel” by showing sameness and difference in conceptualization and contextualization of the discourse elsewhere. Ojo’s earlier critique of Gifford provided a balanced perspective on the provenance of the prosperity gospel in Africa, although he himself took another extreme position. As he countered:

Prosperity and success as religious ideas were not introduced to Africa by American televangelists and they are not “foreign elements” in African Christianity as Paul Gifford (1990) has asserted . . . the emphasis was indigenously developed as a response to the socio-economic changes of the 1980s. African Charismatics have been associated with American evangelists from the mid-1970s, yet did not develop this teaching until the mid-1980s when many African nations began to feel the impact of the IMF-inspired Structural Adjustment Programmes. The reality, therefore, is that Charismatics have read the Scriptures on their own and have appropriated its message to suit their contemporary socio-economic situation.¹⁸

The Charismatic quest for wealth responded to economic hardships in Africa and their leaders were incorporating the economic changes occurring in the society into the existing store of their religious experience.¹⁹ Thus, while a re-reading of the Scriptures

produced a distinctive perspective on the prosperity discourse, the indigenous culture within which the message is preached has had enormous impact on the nature of prosperity teachings.²⁰ Ostensibly, Gifford seems to have soft-pedaled on his controversial assertion on externality as a result of criticism. He argues elsewhere that:

In Africa, it is obvious that the faith gospel builds on traditional preoccupations. Africa's traditional religions were focused on material realities . . . But Africa's current Pentecostalism are increasingly articulated in terms of the faith gospel normally associated with a standardized American form . . . I suggest that in the form which it is widely heard in Africa the African preoccupation with material realities has been subsumed into this standardized formulation.²¹

I suspect that this superficial shift was only a smokescreen as later writings betray.²² The rest of this paper focuses on our case study of the RCCG: providing a brief overview of RCCG history, demographic spread and transnationalization; and then exploring the Pentecostal discourse within the context of the church, while also demonstrating the key constitutive elements that shape her economic base.

The Redeemed Christian Church of God: A Brief History

The RCCG is a typical example of an indigenous African Pentecostal/Charismatic church. Pa Josiah Akindayomi following a divine call to a special mission founded it in Lagos (Nigeria) in 1952. Pa Akindayomi became popular for his charismatic qualities and healing activities, although the church did not spread widely under his tutelage. Most parishes (branches) were limited to western Nigeria with only a few in eastern and northern Nigeria. It has spread from Nigeria to about 60 countries and has over two million members around the world.²³ Enoch Adejare Adeboye, a former professor of Applied Mathematics—Hydrodynamics, succeeded Pa Akindayomi as the General Overseer in 1980, transformed the image and stature of the RCCG, and launched her into global religious maps. Through Adeboye's charismatic qualities and healing activities coupled with modernization processes, the church has sustained considerable organizational, numerical growth, and geo-ethnic spread within and beyond Nigeria. It is believed to be the fastest growing and one of the most popular Pentecostal churches in Nigeria today. RCCG history on the official website records that:

Since 1981, an open explosion began with the number of parishes growing in leaps and bounds. At the last count, there are at least about 2000 parishes of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria. On the International scene, the church is present in other African nations including C'ote D'Ivoire, Ghana, Zambia, Malawi, Zaire, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Gambia, Cameroon, and South Africa. In Europe, the church is spread in England, Germany, and France. In the United States, there are parishes in Dallas, Tallahassee, Houston, New York, Washington, and Chicago and also in the Caribbean states of Haiti and Jamaica.²⁴

Current information gleaned from the RCCG website parish directory suggests an under-representation of her geographical spread. The church presents a conservative

estimate of over 5,000 parishes with a large membership in several countries across the globe.²⁵

RCCG parishes worldwide are organized into “areas,” with each “area” subdivided into “zones” for administrative exigencies. Each zone made up of several parishes is assigned a coordinator who provides administrative and doctrinal leadership for a group of parishes.²⁶ For instance, the RCCG North America area comprising the US, Canada, and the Caribbean Islands is divided into ten zones. At the RCCGNA Annual Convention held in Dallas, Texas in 2003, over 120 parishes were listed.²⁷ The first RCCG parish in the US was founded in 1992 in Detroit, Michigan. Parishes were later started in Florida, Texas, Massachusetts, and other states. During one of his visits to the US, Pastor Adeboye contacted James Fadele, an engineer employed by Ford Motors and living with his family in Detroit, Michigan. Prior to his arrival in the US, Fadele was an RCCG church worker in Nigeria. Adeboye instructed him to do something to carry out God’s design for the church in North America. Many of the workers who spent between six months and two years abroad needed a place of worship “where they could feel at home.” Consequently, a fellowship group comprising of twelve families was formed and the parish was formally registered in October 1994. Pastor Enoch Adeboye, the General Overseer, flew in from Nigeria to attend the parish’s inauguration ceremony. However, when the first local leader abruptly decided to return home, a new pastor was invited from Nigeria. In November 1994, Pastor Dr. Ajibike Akinkoye moved with his family to Dallas to oversee the new parish. The Dallas parish later helped as host to fourteen full-fledged RCCG parishes. There are twelve existing parishes in the city of Houston and others located in different parts of Texas. The desire and enthusiasm towards establishing parishes in North America is not unconnected with the vision and goals of members as expressed in RCCG “Mission Statement”:

It is our goal to make heaven. It is our goal to take as many people as possible with us. In order to accomplish our goals, holiness will be our lifestyle. In order to take as many people with us as possible, we will plant churches within five minutes walking distance in every city and town of developing countries; and within five minutes driving distance in every city and town of developed countries. We will pursue these objectives until every nation in the world is reached for Jesus Christ our Lord.”²⁸

In the case of RCCGNA, this statement took on a qualifying addendum in view of the demographic peculiarity of the North American region. When planting new parishes in North America and Caribbean countries, the location to any existing parish must be at least 30 minutes driving distance.²⁹ Samuel Shorimade pointed out that evangelizing North America was important for the RCCGNA because it has the reputation of being “God’s country” but has allowed moral slackness and the RCCGNA has come in with worship, praised and a message for them to discover God.³⁰

The Redemption Camp—RCCG North America

The RCCG is settling on the American geo-cultural landscape through the reproduction of the Redemption Camp. The Redemption Camp (a.k.a. Redemption City) located along

the Lagos–Ibadan Expressway in Nigeria doubles as the RCCG International headquarters. It is the most important sacred space of the church where they host their religious programs and festivals, such as the Holy Ghost Service (an all-night prayer, healing, and miracle service), which metamorphosed into the International Holy Ghost Festival, drawing at least a million participants to any one event. Recently renamed the Holy Ghost Congress, it takes place annually at the specially prepared Holy Ghost arena at Redemption City.³¹ The Camp physically spans over ten square hectares of land acquired within two decades of its inauguration. The most expansive facility at the site is a large auditorium believed to host over half a million people at a single religious event. The geography of the Camp is diversified with physical structures hosting a conference center, guesthouse, and chalets, and a presidential villa set aside for government functionaries and politicians who visit the Camp. Also situated at the site is a maternity center, an orphanage, a post office, a gas station, bookstores, supermarkets, a bakery, and canteen. Other significant facilities include two banks, a secondary school, and a bible school. An estate consisting of residential buildings also has come to characterize its topography. Thus, the Redemption Camp is significant because of its the religious and spiritual functions it offers to members and non-members, and it represents an avenue where social, economic, cultural, ecological and political functions meet at a crossroad.

By 2003, the RCCGNA had fully acquired a multimillion-dollar property of over 400 hectares of land in Floyd (Hunt County), Dallas-Texas, replicating the Redemption Camp and International headquarters in Nigeria.³² The new Redemption Camp serves as the RCCGNA headquarters. The initiative of a Redemption Camp and acquisition of land revolve around similar visionary and revelatory circumstances experienced by Enoch Adeboye and Ajibike Akinkoye at different times. Narrating his prolonged spiritual experience during the formative years of the RCCG parish in Dallas, Akinkoye claimed that he heard a voice which he later recognized was the voice of God, which told him that he would not build a large church, but smaller ones in the Dallas Metropolitan area, the later he be given a camp. He told Adeboye the General Overseer his vision and he concurred that 10 years earlier, when he Adeboye was in Dallas on his way to a church meeting in Oklahoma, God shoed showed told him that He would give the RCCGNA a camp in Dallas.³³

The quest for land, the contacts with the landowners, the actual acquisition, selling rates, and the payment procedure evoke spiritually and religiously dominated narratives believed to be the vivid manifestation of God's vision and miracles. The Redemption Camp under construction will include the Holy Ghost Ground, chapels, a Bible college, baptismal pool, recreational center, administrative building, library, banquet and seminar halls, shopping mall, restaurants, community center, guesthouses, residential accommodation, and an impressive driveway.³⁴ The duplication of the camp in Dallas is important for several reasons. It represents the decentralization of church programs from being concentrated at the international headquarters in Lagos. Holding these events at the Dallas Redemption Camp reduces logistic and financial problems where RCCG members have to travel the long distance to attend similar programs at the International headquarters. Harsh immigration policies prevent members with illegal status to attend such programs outside the US. Most of the resources used in procuring and developing the Redemption Camp were generated in the church.

The Transnationalization of New African Churches: The RCCG

Recent immigration to the US has fluid processes of transnational networks, links, and residencies that characterize what Stephen Castles and Mark Miller described as “the age of migration.”³⁵ The transnational nature of many African churches challenges the assumption that immigrants usually cut off ties and links with their homeland after integration into the new host context. Most African immigrant churches are rooted locally but connected to their home base in Africa and other places across the globe. These communities share religious, economic, political ties as well as friendship and kinship, maintained through the telephone and the Internet, which have become a central feature of developing and maintaining a diasporic identity. In an article on “New Black Pentecostal Churches in Britain,” Hunt rightly indicates that the new, black, and African churches are not important in a global climate because of the Africanity but because they are transnational ministries that affect many people. They are committed to systematic proselytization to plant churches around the globe. Communities like the RCCG in pursuit of converts offer scholars an opportunity to study what happens in their home territory and around the world.³⁶

Thus, the import of local and global networks among African churches at home and abroad cannot be over-emphasized because they are significant to the new African migrants. Africans have established ecumenical affiliations, engage in pastoral exchanges between Africa, Europe and the US, special events, conferences, prayer networks, internet sites, international ministries, publications, audio/video, and tele-evangelism. The link “flow” is two-directional, because those who send receive links also. The proliferation of social ties and relationships among new African migrants, and between migrant churches, host churches, and their home base has implications that need to be contextually understood. Some of these groups frequently organize local programs, which have a global focus because it links the local church with other churches globally. The increasing mobility and itinerancy of religious leaders, freelance evangelists, and members between the homeland and diasporic spaces cannot be over-emphasized. The crowded itinerary of RCCG General Overseer, Enoch Adeboye, within and beyond Africa makes him one of the most traveled African Pentecostal leaders. This complex peregrination partly demonstrates an instance of religious transnationalization of African churches in diaspora.

The RCCG represents one of the many African churches that are now consciously engaged in sending missionaries to evangelize Europe, the USA, and other parts of the globe. Many African churches have commissioned missionaries provided them with financial and material resources. While this “reverse-mission” initiative is not unique to Africa, African Christian movements are nevertheless engaged in transmitting their religious traditions beyond their immediate geo-ethnic contexts.

Changing Austerity to Prosperity: RCCG Prosperity Discourse

Health and wealth are central issues on RCCG worldview. Health comprises physical, spiritual, mental, material, psychological, and social wellbeing. In the diaspora, it also

includes the right to gainful employment, fair wages, residence permits, and a right to a non-aggressive environment, where one lives in dignity and with decency. Ill health is understood as a potent manifestation of poverty. Their ritual traditions have strategies for members to employ and inoculate themselves against the demons and maladies of poverty. In this section, we contend that internal church dynamics; the prevalence and packaging of healing rituals account largely for the rapid expansion of the RCCG in particular and Pentecostal Christianity in general.

In what appears ostensibly as an internal, official reflection or defense of an external, public critique on Pentecostal churches preoccupation with the prosperity gospel, Adeboye declared in a sermon during the July 2004 Holy Ghost Service that he does not preach prosperity frequently because some preachers have focused on it as if that was all of God's counsel to the church. Arguing that God wants him to preach the whole counsel, he focuses on prosperity one time in a year. Using the themes "anointed to flourish," he pointed out that there are several groups of people: some are poor, some are comfortable, some rich, some are wealthy, and some flourish. He then told the listeners that what he had to say that day could be one the most important messages they have heard in their life time which could turn their lives around and make them smile.³⁷ One of Adeboye's opening sermon remarks is very striking as a deliberate strategy to draw participants' attention to his sermon. Illustrating his initial remarks with the parable of "Jesus feeding 5000 people with the lunch of a small boy," he announced that there was someone in the audience whose austerity would be turned to prosperity if that person lifted their eyes up to God and thank God. Such "prophetic utterances" often attract a chorused "Amen" from an excited crowd of worshippers and participants. This singular sermon text presents a dimension of the "official" discourse on prosperity and reveals the hermeneutics of poverty, health, and wealth. Adeboye highlights the source and nature of poverty. As he remarks, "There is no greatness in poverty because poverty is a curse pronounced by God on those who are disobedient," "There is nothing glorious about poverty. It brings hunger." "In Proverbs 10: 15 the Bible says the destruction of the poor is their poverty. Poverty is a destroyer and everything that is trying to destroy your destiny; I command that they be destroyed tonight in Jesus name." He contrasts financial poverty and poverty in the form of sickness, "Anybody who is sickly, all is not well with him so that when you are sick, it doesn't matter how much money you have, you are poor."

Adeboye espouses on the hermeneutics of health and wealth. In what also appears as a critique of "holiness" and "pietistic" Christianity, he underscores the import of wealth and holy living in this- and other-worldly orientation. Adeboye argues that health and wealth belong together, citing 3 John 2 where the Apostle wishes that his readers prosper and live in good health. He also pointed out that barrenness is also poverty and he is praying that those who trust God will become pregnant and have the fruit of their womb, stating rather boldly that God will answer the prayers of the barren that month. He called into questions the views that glory poverty by claiming that one has to be poor to enter heaven. He argued that he held such a position but realized that one could be the poorest person on earth, but if he or she is not born again, that individual would not see God but suffer in vain. If on the other hand, you are the richest individual on earth and are born again, you will also have a mansion in heaven. He affirmed that he will enjoy here on earth and also enjoy in heaven.

This view also provides a critique to claims often made by scholars that African Christianity or religion in general is only preoccupied with this-worldly goals to the neglect of other-worldly orientations. He rephrases the ideas of the parable of the rich young man where Jesus says at the end, “I tell you the truth, it is very hard for a rich man to get into the kingdom of heaven . . . It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 19:23–24) and makes it less enigmatic for a rich, holy man to gain access. Adeboye’s sermons are often interposed with “prophetic utterances” suggesting immediate resolution of existential problems. Adeboye asserts in an imperative tone, “But God has a cure for poverty.” He announces “And I decree to somebody here today, you may find it difficult to pay your house rent but very soon you’ll be drinking tea with the president (Amen!). How can that be? I know it can be because I’m a living example.” Towards the end of the sermon, he hints further, “Here we are talking about prosperity and the Lord is solving the problem of one fellow. He said that somebody is getting a brand new brain (Amen!) Thank you Father!”

To understand the prosperity discourse in African Pentecostal Christianity, one should probe the complex factors attracts people to these churches and think about the proliferation of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in sub-Saharan Africa? Results from our ethnographic study shows that many people throng to these churches on health related grounds. Our in-depth interviews with RCCG informants detail illnesses, their accounts of treatments received in the church, and the social situation in which they live. Through participant observation in their services and programs, we documented hundreds of “testimonies”, which recount their conversion narratives or their history of affiliation. The semi-structured questionnaire dealt with demographic information of members, the reasons for joining a local church as well as covering certain aspects of church life. The interviews, testimony, and questionnaire provided ample healing narratives above prosperity. Other reasons for joining the church vary from the invitation of a friend or family, to the attendance of a revival program, crusade, music, doctrine, or miracles. Some claim divine appointment or the directive of the Holy Spirit.

We contend that if the prosperity or faith gospel simply entails material success, health, and wealth, then it is not new to indigenous worldviews, mission churches, and AICs who have preoccupied themselves with the pursuit of the “the good things in life.” The failure to realize these objectives largely accounts for the switching of religious affiliation. The Yoruba phrase/song, “*Owo, Omo, Alafia repete*” (literarily meaning “money, children, good health in abundance” popularly rendered by Yoruba Christians at thanksgiving rituals best eulogizes the importance of health and wealth. Thus, the old preoccupation and quest for the good things in life have now been customized and labeled prosperity gospel within Pentecostal discourse.

Tithes and Offerings: The Malachi Rhetoric and RCCG Economic Base

Tithes (from the Hebrew *maaser*) and offerings (from *minchah*) represent one of RCCG fundamental beliefs, an essential part of worship, and potent ways of invoking the

blessings of God. The church reminds people that of their obligation to give tithes and offerings because God has commanded them to do so. The tithes are used to provide for the ministers who serve the church and the offerings are used to provide assistance to the needy in the church. They require members to pay a tithe on all of their income.³⁸ The belief in tithes and offerings is linked to biblical precedence where God enjoined the Israelites at different periods of their religious history to pay tithes and offerings. For instance, one of the notable works of Abraham was to pay tithes to Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem (Gen. 14:17–20; cf. Heb. 7:4–10). In the Hebrew political economy, one tenth of the income of the people was set apart to support public worship of God (cf. Lev. 27:30, 32; Gen. 28:22). What taxes symbolize for the State is what tithes represent for the church (cf. I Cor. 9:13–14). In the RCCG, tithes represent one tenth of a members' total or gross income. While a tithe means 10% of all benefits that come a member's way, such as salary, inheritance, gifts, and even the interest earned on bank accounts, an offering is essentially different. Offerings go beyond the 10% tithes and could be cash or property. The giver takes the initiative on what to give towards a particular need or needs of the church or an individual. Several biblical references are also evoked to support the giving of offerings (cf. Gen. 4:4–5; Exo. 23:15; Exo. 34:20; I Sam. 2:30; Lev. 22:17–25, 29; Psa. 50:14, 23; Eph. 5:10; Rom. 12:1–2; II Cor. 9:6–8; Gal. 6:7–9). RCCG worship services and programs include thanksgiving rituals when people give thanks for the birth of a child, marriage, promotion, recovery from sickness, procurement of visas, passing examinations, New Year, Christmas celebrations, safe journeys, buying a new car, building a new house, as well as in all rites of passage. Tithing is seen as a solemn covenant that has now replaced the many offerings found in the Hebrew Bible because Jesus died and paid the ultimate prize. However, Christians still have to give thanks with their tithes and offerings.

The Church argues that in Malachi 3:8–12, the scripture states:

Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, How do we rob you? In Tithes and Offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing God. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruits, says the Lord Almighty. Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land, says the Lord Almighty (Malachi 3:8–12).

The second passage is taken from II Corinthians 9:6–7, which states:

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Proving God by giving tithes is called a faith principle. While the RCCG strongly enjoins members to tithe, members are not compelled directly. Rather, the liturgical structure makes ample space for the collection of tithes. Prior to this stage, the oft-cited references

are recited as a way of calling members to wake up to their responsibility. It is believed that if one does not tithe faithfully, he or she will lose lots of God's blessing, because failure to tithe is stealing directly from God and this will bring a curse upon a member and his/her business.

Tithes and offerings are revolving themes in a sermon and church publications in order to clarify misappropriation and misinterpretation by members. "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6:38). The principle of reciprocity, which "tithe and offering" represents, is further homed into members' ears by singing and dancing. Adeboye has enjoined members to attach utmost priority to payment of tithes: "What you have stolen from God, I appeal to you, restore and He will surprise you . . . God says when you begin to pay your tithes, all the devourers that have been eating up your money and all the abortive efforts that you have been making, He will silence."³⁹ He has also discussed the correlation between acquisition of wealth and giving offering to God. On one level, the tithe and offering discourse suggests a pathway from poverty to prosperity. It is even literally rephrased as: "If you need money, make sure you pay tithes and give offerings. Money begets money." When you pay tithes, you are not expecting the returns from man's limited ability but from God's unlimited supply. Members who tithe give testimonies about the blessings they have received.⁴⁰ Some of the testimonies indicate that there are misinterpretations of how God blesses the one who tithes.

The enormous financial resources generated through tithing are primarily geared towards catering for the welfare of ministers and church employees, as well as for the poor and the needy within the church. However, only a very small percentage of RCCG parish pastors earn their pay from the church. Several of the local pastors operate as honorary pastors while others are supported materially by respective local parishes.

In conclusion, every RCCG parish is autonomous in many ways, and yet there is a reasonable degree of cohesion without uniformity. Each individual parish is linked to the RCCG international headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria, through an evolving hierarchical administrative structure.⁴¹ At the central organizational level, local parishes are required to make monthly financial remittances through administrative zonal headquarters to RCCG International Headquarters. This includes 10% of total Tithes and Offerings of all RCCG fellowships, 30% of Tithes, and 10% of Offerings of all parishes whether already dedicated by the General Overseer or not. Each local parish is expected in addition to submit a comprehensive financial report for proper financial record. For instance, in RCCGNA, each parish is required to send a portion of its monthly income to the Finance Coordinating Center in Houston. The funds accumulating there are used to assist new, young, or weak parishes that may need financial help for a while, and also for international missions.⁴² While RCCG primary source of internally generated revenue is from tithes and offerings, other sources include Sunday worship offertory, thanksgiving offerings, special program offerings, donations, vows, pledges, and special levies on projects such as building constructions, purchase of equipments. RCCG expansion and proliferation in diaspora were founded out of the initiative of local parishes in Nigeria assumed financial responsibility by sending and supporting a missionary pastor and providing facilities and infrastructure for the new parish. This

evidence calls for a further re-examination of our explanation that privileges ecclesiastical externality and extraversion in explaining the success of African Pentecostalism.

Notes

- 1 See "Spirit and Power"—*Report of a 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals*. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, October 2006. Available at: <http://pewforum.org/publications/surveys/pentecostals-06.pdf>.
- 2 Jenkins 2002.
- 3 Barrett, et. al, 2001.
- 4 See "Pentecostal Power". Pew Research Center Publications, October 5, 2006. Available at: <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/254/pentecostal-power>.
- 5 Dempster, et al. (eds) 1999.
- 6 "Spirit and Power" *Report of a 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals*. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, October 2006. p. 1.
- 7 Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose, 1996.
- 8 Gifford, 1998:308.
- 9 Gifford 1990:373.
- 10 Brouwer, Gifford and Rose, 1996:1.
- 11 Van Dijk, 2000.
- 12 Droogers, 2001:41–61.
- 13 Gifford, 1990: 373–88.
- 14 Gifford, 1990:75.
- 15 Gifford, 1990:382.
- 16 Gifford, 1990:383.
- 17 Gifford. 1990:382.
- 18 Ojo, 1996:106.
- 19 Ojo, 1996:106.
- 20 Kalu, 2000; Adogame, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005:203.
- 21 Gifford, 2001:64.
- 22 cf. Gifford, 2004.
- 23 Adogame, 2004a.
- 24 See RCCG History, available at: http://main.rccg.org/church_ministry/church_history_main.htm
- 25 See "A Brief History of the Redeemed Christian Church of God", *Sunday School Manual, The Redeemed Christian Church of God*, 2002/2003 Edition, p. 127.
- 26 See *The Structure, Administration, and Finance of the Redeemed Christian Church in North America*, Dallas: RCCGNA Headquarters, 2003.
- 27 "The Latter Rain" 7 Annual RCCG North American Convention Program, Dallas, June 2003.
- 28 See the official website of the RCCG: <http://www.rccg.org> created and maintained by the RCCG Internet Project, Houston Texas, USA.
- 29 See "Addendum—Our Poise," *The Redeemed Christian Church of God, North America and Caribbean Statement of Fundamental Truths*, a publication of RCCGNA, n.d. pp. 39–40.
- 30 Personal Interview with founding Pastor Dr. Samuel Shorimade at the RCCG Cornerstone Worship Center for All Nations parish, Cambridge, Massachusetts on 23 November 2003.

- 31 The Holy Ghost Congress attracts about two million and some describe it as the largest Christian gathering on earth. See Lee Grady, "Nigeria's Miracle: How a Sweeping Christian Revival is transforming Africa's most populous nation," *Charisma and Christian Life*, vol. 27, No. 10, May 2002, p. 38–41.
- 32 Personal Interview with Pastor (Dr.) Ajibike Akinyoye at the RCCGNA Headquarters, Dallas, TX on 9 March 2004. Cf. Laolu Akande, "Multi-million dollar Redemption Camp underway in U.S.," *The Guardian*, 8 April 2003. Also available at: <http://odili.net/news/source/2003/apr/3/100.html> or <http://www.rccgna.org/news.htm>.
- 33 Personal Interview with Pastor (Dr.) Ajibike Akinyoye 9 March 2004. See also "Redemption Camp, Texas USA," *Christian Character*, a publication of RCCGNA, June 2002, pp. 2–5.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Castles and Miller, 2003.
- 36 Hunt and Lightly, 2001:121.
- 37 Sermon text of Pastor E.A. Adeboye, RCCG General Overseer at the Holy Ghost Service, RCCG Redemption Camp, Lagos-Ibadan Expressway on July 2, 2004. Available at: http://main.rccg.org/holy_ghost_service/2004_hgs?hgs_jul_04.htm
- 38 See "RCCG Fundamental Beliefs", available at: <http://home.rccg.org/ChurchHistory/FundamentalBeliefs3.htm>
- 39 E.A. Adeboye, *How to Turn Your Austerity to Prosperity* (Lagos: The CRM, 1989), pp. 16–17.
- 40 See Akin, A., Testimony, "End of Financial Struggle," available at: <http://www.rccgsalvationcenter.org/testimonies-pg2.htm>.
- 41 See "RCCG: Past, Present and Future. The Structure, Administration and Finance of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in North America," 7 Annual RCCG North America Convention Program, June 18–20, 2003, pp. 15, 30.
- 42 *The Redeemed Christian Church of God North America, Inc.: General Information and Church Planting Manual*, Fall 2001 Edition.

CHAPTER 22

Islam in Africa

Yushau Sodiq

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the meaning of Islam, its emergence, spread, impact in Africa, how Muslims relate to non-Muslims, and the challenges they face today. Africans were Muslims before many Arabs knew about it because by 615 C.E., Islam had reached Abyssinia (present day Ethiopia) when Prophet Muhammad sent his followers to seek refuge with the King of Abyssinia, King Negus (*al-Najashi*). He welcomed the Muslims and allowed them to stay and practice their religion. The first caller (*Muadhin*) to prayer in Islam was Bilal bin Rabah from Ethiopia. Islam is a total submission to the Will of God and a way of life for Muslims and finding peace with oneself, one's neighbors, and the Creator. Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, was born in Mecca around 570 C.E. and grew up among his people, the Quraysh; he was a shepherd and a trader. He married at the age 25 to Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, a wealthy merchant at Mecca who was 15 years older than Muhammad. She employed Muhammad to escort her caravan to Syria and came back with a lot of profit. Khadijah was impressed with his honesty and good character and asked him to marry her. They married, lived together peacefully, and had six children together, four daughters and two boys.

Before Muhammad became a prophet in 610 C.E., he used to meditate at Mount Hira at Mecca. He experienced the first revelation from God on this mountain in *Ramadan*, 610 C.E. He preached faith in one God, good deeds, and shunning of evil deeds at Mecca for thirteen years before he immigrated to *Yathrib*, a city later known as *Medina*. All the revelations the Prophet received were later compiled into a holy book called *Qur'an*, which means recitation. Muhammad preached a universal message and exhorted his followers to spread the message throughout the world. When he immigrated to Medina in 622 C.E., he invited Arab Bedouins, Jews, and Christians in Arabia to follow Islam. He formed an Islamic State before he died in 632 C.E. He did not name a successor and his community has been divided between the Sunnis and Shiite sects until today.

Muhammad's central message to people was that there is one God and all should worship him. He called on people to practice justice, and deal fairly with one another, promote peaceful co-existence, and make peace with oneself and with one's neighbors, do good works, and shun evil deeds. Muhammad's followers admired his message and found it very appealing.¹ They considered him their great exemplar, whose life they wanted to emulate. Thus, they invited others to join them and took upon themselves the propagation of Islam to their immediate families and relatives.

When Muhammad died in 632 C.E., his followers selected Abu Bakr, Muhammad's friend and father-in-law to lead the Muslims. Abu Bakr took it upon himself to spread Islam in the Arabian Peninsula during his two years reign as Caliph. Umar bin al-Khattab became the Caliph in 634 C.E., and sent out Muslim missionaries to many parts of the world including Africa. He also sent one of his military leaders, Amr bin al-As to Egypt. Egypt fell under the rule of Muslims in 641 C.E. marking the beginning of an intensive Islamic expansion in Africa. From Egypt, the Muslim army conquered North Africa, Morocco, Algeria, and other places within three decades. In the beginning, some Africans resisted the invasion by the Arab Muslims but eventually, many of them converted to Islam voluntarily because, when a Muslim army conquered a territory, they retained local leaders to govern and collect taxes for the Muslim leaders. Muslim soldiers often lived in garrisons outside the city to retain their language, their culture, and to avoid a total assimilation into the conquered culture and civilization and maintain their Islamic identity and establish their own distinctive Islamic values.

Many Egyptians in the 630s and 640s were members of the Coptic Church. Sectarian divisions among Christians and heavy taxation made local leaders welcome the Muslims as a relief from oppression.² The Muslim army retained the Egyptian leaders in their positions. The Egyptians and their families gradually converted to Islam by choice. Arabic language was introduced and soon became the language of trade between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Coptic language, which was used for both religious and everyday, gradually was used only for liturgical purposes in the Coptic Church.

Africans were attracted to the Muslims because of their moral values, mythical traditions, sense of justice, and fairness in trade. Sufis mystical teachings and ideals also impressed and inspired locals to become Muslims. During the early phase, Islam spread mainly in the major cities along trade routes, and the rich, learned, skilled, and elite people joined the religion. In some places, the kings converted to Islam and his people followed his example because they trusted their leaders. However, if the king reverted to his old religion, as one Ghanaian King did, which occasionally happened, his subjects would revert with him.³ Gradually, in the conquered territories, the process of Arabization began and Arabic became the language of the people. Egyptians adopted Islamic culture and during the tenth century, Cairo became the capital of Egypt and home of Al-Azhar University, the oldest University in the Muslim world which was established in 969 C.E. by the Fatimide governor, al-Hakeem. Al-Azhar became a Sunni institution under the leadership of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (Saladin d. 1193). He defeated the Christian Crusaders in 1187. Uqbat bin Nafi led Muslims to conquer North Africa and the Berber people eventually embraced the Islamic faith and its mystical traditions.⁴ The Berber considered themselves free people and had never been conquered by others

before Islam came to them. The Berber initially resisted Islamic ways of life because they thought Islam was an Arab religion but gradually they embraced Islamic values, ethics, and syncretized them with their customs. By the eleventh century, Islam was a thriving religion after the influx of Bani Hilal among the Berber and the influence of Sufi mystical traditions and spirituality.

Muslims from North Africa introduced the religion to West Africans through trade links. Those who became Muslims began to learn reading and writing and within a short time, African kings and chiefs recruited these learned Muslims as scribes, secretaries, and advisors. Islam grew rapidly in Mali, Mauritania, and the Sene-Gambia area in the fourteenth century especially during the reign of Mansa Musa, the Muslim King of Mali. King Musa advanced the course of Islam, made pilgrimage to Mecca, visited some Arab countries, and brought Muslim scholars back to Mali. He established schools and public libraries around Timbuktu, the capital of Mali. Islam became the religion of the state and the city of Timbuktu became a respectable center of learning for all West African countries with many libraries and great mosques with African architecture.⁵ When Musa died his sons competed among themselves to succeed him. This opened the door for the King of Morocco to conquer the Malian kingdom. The old kingdom declined when the French colonized Mali.

Factors Leading to the Spread of Islam in Africa

African hospitality contributed to the spread of Islam. Prophet Muhammad sent some of his followers to Abyssinia, commenting that it was a country “where no man is wronged, a land of righteousness.” Islam also spread because of the nature of African Traditional Religion’s non-mission orientation which allows multiplicity of religions. Africans who admired Islam embraced it and those who did not like it refused it; they did not persecute converts to Islam because it was not seen as a threat to African religions. Islamic social programs like education also made Islam attractive to Africans. Furthermore, Africans appreciated the idea that in Islam all people were equal. Such sense of equality was more appealing than the hierarchical structures in some local religions. In Islam, one does not have to be ordained to become an Imam. As long as one knows how to recite the Qur’an in daily prayers, one can be an Imam. New members are considered equals to all other Muslims. They receive equal respect, protection, and are given assurance that they can occupy any position through their efforts and knowledge. Equality is enshrined in the Qur’an ch 49:13 as well as in the Prophetic tradition where Muhammad is quoted to have said: “I admonish you to fear God and yield obedience to my successor, although he may be a black slave from Abyssinia.” In another *hadith*, Muhammad said, “there is no superiority of an Arab over non-Arab, or non-Arab over an Arab or a white over a black or a black over a white except through the act of righteous deeds. All of you are descendants of Adam, and he was created from clay.”⁶ This sense of equality appealed to Africans and enticed them to embrace Islam.

Other specific factors that contributed to the spread of Islam in North Africa include the system of indirect rule, since Muslims allowed the leaders of conquered territories to retain their positions but required them to pay taxes to the Muslims. No drastic

changes actually took place and therefore the conquered people felt little threat to their existence. There was also a huge division of Christianity into different schools of theology. Conflicting theological positions among theologians like Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, St. Augustine, and many others contributed to and shaped Christianity. They disagreed on many theological issues and suspected one another of heresy. When Islam came, it was a spiritual and social relief for North African Christians, who had suffered tremendously from the corruption and the burden of heavy taxes levied upon them by their leaders.

Furthermore, Islam is a communal religion where social solidarity is an important virtue. Believers wake up each morning at the sound of the call to prayer from *mu'adhin* (a caller to prayer). The first caller to prayer in Islam was an African, Bilal bin Rabah, from Abyssinia who served as the *mu'adhin* of the Prophet Muhammad. This call summons Muslims to the mosque for morning (*fajr*) prayer. After the prayer, adults disperse to work for their livelihood, while the children remain in the mosque and learn how to read the Qur'an. Occasionally, women pray at the mosque but often times, they pray at home. At the morning prayer (*fajr*), Muslims greet one another and ask for those who are absent.

The noon and afternoon prayers are not well attended in many places because at that time the majority of Muslims are still at work and therefore it is difficult for them to leave work and come to the mosque except on Friday. But sunset and evening prayers (*Maghrib and Isha*) always draw a big crowd. Between these two prayers, Muslims socialize, chat, debate, and occasionally listen to lectures from their Imams, Muslim clergy. This congregational prayer (*salat al-Juma'at*) enables them to meet one another on a daily basis and strengthen their relationship with one another. On Friday, all Muslims at one locale are expected to pray together at a central mosque and listen to the sermon by the Imam that educates and addresses the issues affecting Muslims locally and globally. Friday sermons are delivered in local languages in some African communities. Where Arabic is used, the sermon is translated into the local language. Friday is a holy day but Muslims are encouraged to work for their livelihood after Friday prayers. Women are not required to attend Friday prayers but should not be prevented if they choose to attend. There are no special seating places, no discrimination, no racism, and no special dress code. This social atmosphere of equality has attracted many people to Islam. Naming ceremonies for babies bring people together. At such occasions an animal such as a goat or lamb is offered as a sacrifice. These are community celebrations and thanksgiving to God who gives life.

Islamic marriage continues to be the focus of the Muslim family structure. Marriage is a contract between two consenting families; it's a union between two couples supported by families on both sides. It carries with it an elaborate feast and rituals which make it very attractive and enjoyable to the community. Initially, a man would propose to marry a woman of his choice and the parents of the bride would be informed. If they approve the initial proposal, the bride's consent is sought. Upon her consent, preparation for the marriage follows. Islamic marriage has to meet four conditions: consent of couples, consent of the girl's father or guardian (*waliyy*), witness of two male Muslims, one from each side, and an agreed upon dowry (a token gift—*mahr*) for the bride. Marriage is proclaimed at a public ceremony (*waleemat*). Marriage ceremonies may be

elaborate if the couples prefer or it may be less elaborate; this depends on the financial status of the family. The ceremony accompanies dancing, feasting, and some traditional events. Arranged marriages exist among Muslims in Africa but are against the spirit of Islamic teaching, which insists upon the consent of the bride.

Polygamy, which is acceptable to Muslims, has been widely practiced at various times in many societies throughout the world and involved followers of some major religions. In Judaism, Abraham, David, Solomon, and Rehoboam married many wives (I Chronicles 3:1–9; I Kings 11:3; II Chronicles 11:21). Christians condemn polygamy because God created man and woman to become one flesh through marriage (Matthew 19:1–12). Islam allows polygamy (Qur'an ch 4:3) in cases of ardent human nature and in certain circumstances where it is better than leaving many women helpless and without consort.⁷ The supporters of polygamy argue that its practice actually helps resolve the social problem of having many women without men. It also prevents birth outside marriage. Supporters of polygamy argue sometimes that there are too many women and too few men as a result of famine, war, or epidemics, as happened in Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, Burundi, Baghdad, and Afghanistan. In such epidemics, men were allowed to marry more than one wife to prevent prostitution and illegal relationships.

The opponents of polygamy argue that it constitutes unfair treatment, a discrimination against women, and a threat to marriage. They also refer to the severe abuses of women by polygamous husbands in many aspects of social and domestic life. They insist that marrying many wives often leads to production of children who receive no proper education; hence they become illiterate, starving, and a burden upon society. In addition, while men, through polygamy, satisfy their sexual desires and lust, women, as a result of such unions, receive physical and emotional damage due to negligence, abuse, and jealousy among the rival wives. Polygamy is declining rapidly due to poverty and public education against it.

Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha

Two major festivals which all Muslims celebrate all over the world including Africa are the feast of break-fast (*Eid al-Fitr*) and the feast of sacrifice (*Eid al-Adha*). Islam requires all capable Muslims to fast in the month of *Ramadan* by abstaining from food, drink, and sexual relationship from dawn to sunset for 29 or 30 days. Muslims mark the end of this fast with a big feast known as *Eid al-Fitr*. It is an expression of thankfulness to God and exchanging of gifts among the believers. In Africa, *Eid al-Fitr* is a joyous occasion and a public holiday. It is celebrated for three or more days. *Eid al-Adha* marks the end of the Islamic calendar year and the occasion of performing pilgrimage to Mecca. During this feast, Muslims sacrifice a lamb, goat, cow, or camel to commemorate the blessings of God upon Prophet Abraham, who fulfilled his covenant with God and substituted his son for a lamb instead of sacrificing Ishmael. The *Eid al-Adha* sacrifice is required from any adult Muslim who is financially capable. The meat is divided into three portions: one portion for the poor, one portion for the relatives, and the last portion for the one who sacrifices.

Another public feast which African Muslims celebrate is the birthday of Prophet Muhammad. Orthodox Muslim scholars frown upon this celebration, arguing that it is an innovation and imitation of other religious traditions that was not observed by the Prophet or his immediate followers. Wherever it is celebrated, the whole community participates in the feast. Even though the *Mawlid* does not involve any sacrifice, people prepare a lot of food and serve a lot of drinks. Muslim missionaries (*du`aat*) use these festivals to invite Africans into Islam; they convince them that Islam is not alien to their culture but rather accommodates many of their cultural heritages.

Influence of African Religions on Islam

The growth of Islam in Africa has not killed indigenous religions.⁸ Islam has borrowed some of its traditions in Africa from indigenous religions. Many Africans believed that ancestors were intermediaries between them and the Supreme God. As converts to Islam, some think that the Sufi saints play the role they believed was played by ancestors. Some African Muslims still participate in local cults like *Eyo* among the Yorubas and *Bori* among the Hausas. African Muslims also introduced religious dances into Islam, something they brought from African religions. They label this prophetic dance *Ijo Anobi'*. Of course, orthodox Muslim scholars frown upon any dance but African Muslims generally think that without it, Islam would not have a great appeal to Africans, who perceive dance as an integral part of their daily social life.

African religion has also influenced Islam by encouraging men and women to attend public gatherings together. Africans do not accept total separation of men and women in the public arena. Both sexes attend public gatherings and they sit separately beside one another and not in the back. In Africa, men and women attend the mosque and other social gatherings and learn together and worship together. Sheikh Uthman Dan Fodio welcomed both men and women into his classes, although some scholars objected to that practice. Many mosques in West Africa are built to accommodate men and women. The women sit on the second floor, on the side, at the back, but not in the basement as practiced in Arabia and Asian countries or in some areas in America. The African practice is correct because when Muhammad was at Medina, he did not put any divider between men and women in his mosque. Rather, he encouraged men and women to be modest and lower their gazes when in the presence of one another. Indeed, women always attended his mosque and he used to admonish them as he admonished male members. They prayed together without any curtain.

Despite the accommodation of African religion and other religions, some Muslims despised African religion and labeled it as paganism, which must surrender to Islam because it has no revealed text. Hence, Muslim missionaries worked tirelessly to convert Africans into Islam through peaceful means, but at times violent methods were employed. The simple and generous gesture expressed by Africans towards others in offering unlimited hospitality to strangers was abused and taken advantage of; foreigners enforced their beliefs upon Africans and considered Africans' simplicity as a sign of weakness.

Some Africans who converted to Islam found it very demanding and hence some reverted to African religions. Thus, during British rule, Southern Sudan was neglected

and no serious development took place there. When the new Sudanese leaders took over in 1950s, they too neglected Southern Sudan, which led to the civil and ethnic cleansing war of today. The extreme poverty of the Southerners led to tribal wars by the government, which began in 1993 and were made known to the world in 2003 by the Christian Catholics. Despite the propaganda of the western world against Sudan, the cause of the tension in the Darfur area was not religion, as portrayed by the western media, but oppression and corruption. Islam should not be blamed for the calamity and destruction in Southern Sudan.⁹

Islam's Influence upon Africans¹⁰

The first influence was the idea of monotheism, one God, Allah. The second influence is that Islam abolished practices like human sacrifices in Egypt. It was reported that before Islam reached Egypt, Egyptians used to sacrifice a female to the River Nile every year whenever it flooded. The flood would remain until a young female was thrown into it as a sacrifice, then it would flow. When the flood erupted after the conquest of Egypt and during the reign of Caliph, Umar bin al-Khattab, Amr bin al-Aas, the governor of Egypt, wrote to Umar asking his advice on what to do. There was a myth that Umar responded by writing a note to be thrown into the Nile river instead of sacrificing a female to it. The note contained verses from the Qur'an and a command from Umar asking the Nile to flow smoothly in the name of Allah without causing any harm to its inhabitants, the Egyptians. When the note was thrown into the Nile, the flood disappeared and since then they have never sacrificed a human being. Another area of Islamic influence upon Africans is theology and has to do with an eschatological belief that when the faithful die, they will go to paradise. Before Islam came to them, when a person dies, his spirit would exist in the spiritual world as long as someone on earth remembers him. When no one remembers him any more, his spirit vanishes and he enters spiritual immortality, the Zamani period.

Islam also has a great impact on the social lives of Africans. Muslims have introduced distinctive dress from other traditions, established mosques as gathering places, introduced festivals, and accommodated cultural practices that do not conflict with Islamic practices. Islam also unites Muslims from one country to another and develops among them a strong sense of brotherhood and sisterhood beyond blood relatives. Muslim countries in Africa have established diplomatic relationships with other Muslim countries. The cities of Bornu, Mali, and Senegal had relationships with the Arab world, Asia, and Turkey. North African Muslim leaders had diplomatic relationships with Europe. Morocco was the first Muslim country to endorse the United States Declaration of Independence. Internationally, through the institution of pilgrimage (*Hajj*), African Muslims journeyed annually to Mecca in Hijaz and joined other Muslims around the world to celebrate the annual pilgrimage. Such attendance afforded them the opportunity to meet other nations and peoples.

Despite all these good relationships with the outside world, Muslim Arabs enslaved Africans especially in East and West Africa.¹¹ Slavery was common among the Africans themselves but Muslim Arabs oftentimes raided non-Muslims, especially the pagans,

and sold them into slavery. Some slaves got their freedom by becoming Muslims or by buying their freedom. Slaves were gradually integrated into the Muslim community and after a while they were totally assimilated. After the abolition of slavery, the slave social class gradually disappeared because Islamic teachings offered a reason for the emancipation of slaves. Prophet Muhammad ordered that slaves should be treated with respect and humility. This was not an endorsement of slavery, which is an oppressive and violent institution. It is unfortunate that in some Muslim countries today, slavery exists.¹² Although they have denied the claim, it has been reported that there are slaves in parts of Mauritania and Sudan.

Islam and Education in Africa¹³

From the beginning of Islam, Muhammad the Prophet sent learned teachers with the missionaries to educate new converts about Islam. After his death and the expansion of the Islamic State, wherever Muslims built a mosque, they used it as a center for teaching the believers the recitation of the Qur'an. From these mosques, the schools (*Madrassah*) emerged. When Africans became Muslims, they built their own mosques and started teaching people about Islam from the mosques and from the residences of the Imams or Muslim scholars. There are two main types of Islamic education in Africa, inherited from the Arabs. The first type is elementary and the other is high school or advanced learning. Initially, there was no limit for the number of years that a student could spend at the elementary stage or high school level. Graduation from elementary depends on the willingness of the teachers to let their students move to another stage and the readiness of the students themselves to move forward. At times, students attended classes at the mosque and then went home, and at times, lived with their teachers and left only when they were permitted to become teachers themselves.

The primary goal of learning is to acquire knowledge about religion and practicing it. There was no intention of attaining paid jobs after completion of learning. The most work that a graduate can get is teaching itself. He transmits what he learns or masters to others. In the elementary level, students learn reading, recitation, and memorization of the Qur'an plus writing of the Qur'an itself in Arabic. They may also receive basic knowledge about the principles of Islam and some ethical foundation of religion. At this stage, students are provided with a copy of the Qur'an or they copy it themselves chapter by chapter into their slate. After they finish learning and memorizing of one chapter or a portion of it, they wipe it off and copy another chapter or portion and so on. They also learn something about *Hadith*, the saying and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad. The most common book learned in elementary stage is the *Forty Hadith* by Imam Muhyi al-Din al-Nawawi. After completion of this level, which may take a few years, if the students are interested, they move or register for a high level which is known as *Ilmi*, advanced level. If their elementary teacher is unable to teach them at this level, they search for another capable teacher. Nearly every mosque in west and east Africa offers the elementary level of education. Learning at this stage focuses on

memorization of short chapters of the Qur'an, which are to be recited in daily prayers plus the basic tenets of Islam. Every Muslim goes through this elementary level of education in order to know how to offer Islamic prayer properly. At the higher level, students study the meanings of the Qur'an, Islamic law, theology, Arabic language, mysticism, literature, and ethics. Where possible, they also study logic and philosophy. The idea that Africans blindly follow Islam without education and that the majority do not know about Islam or that they are illiterate has no basis at all. Unfortunately, some people do think that one who cannot speak any of the European languages is an illiterate.

Unfortunately, Muslims did not send their children to western schools early. This made it difficult for them to compete with others in a job market tailored after western education. Nearly all those who held strategic positions in the government in Africa after the independence were Christians including the states where Muslims were the majority in a population like Senegal. Indeed, the fear of the Muslim parents at that time was absolutely justified because the majority of Muslim children who were schooled at western institutions, missionary schools and colleges, eventually converted to Christianity and abandoned their Islamic heritage. Those who did not convert remained secular and paid no attention to anything religious. Muslims paid a high price for their failure to send their children to modern western schools. They became second class citizens and were jobless when foreign European languages became the *lingua franca* in many African countries.

In the 1980s, the situation had improved greatly in that Muslims had established their own schools and some colleges. They also fought for the inclusion of Islamic studies and occasionally Arabic into the public schools' curriculum. As a result, both Muslims and non-Muslims received the same quality western education and became qualified to compete for government jobs and public services. Many Muslim children attend local universities, while a minority receive scholarships to study Islam and Arabic abroad in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and some other places. Upon their return, they become teachers and missionaries of Islam to their own people. However, they are unable to compete in modern sciences; hence, they are not easily employable in the civil service of their countries.

Two major movements that advance quality education among Africans are the Ismaili Shiite and Ahmadiyyah movements. The Ismaili in East Africa did not only promote Islamic studies among the Muslims, but also were the pioneers in building schools and in promoting modern sciences in Muslim schools and colleges. Through the Aga Khan foundation, they built many schools and colleges where students learn modern sciences like medicine, economics, and law, in addition to general Islamic studies. Even though in the beginning the schools were exclusively for Ismaili members (a Shiite group), they eventually recruited students from the local community. They also served as a role model for many East African Muslim leaders on how to incorporate western education into their curriculum in the public schools.

The Ahmadiyyah movement was introduced to West Africa in 1920s and worked hard in the 1950s and 1960s in all Anglo-Saxon West Africa.¹⁴ It established its own schools, incorporated western education into its schools, and laid great emphasis on

Islamic and modern sciences. It also established teacher training colleges in Nigeria and Ghana that supplied Islamic teachers to public schools to teach in elementary and high schools. The efforts of these two movements cannot be underrated in Africa. Ironically, both movements are considered heretical by Orthodox Muslims.¹⁵ Both groups originated in India and spread all over the Muslim world. Nevertheless, their promotion of western and modern education and the assistance they rendered to African Muslims is tremendous. They were also instrumental in translating the Qur'an, the Muslim scripture, into many African vernacular languages like Swahili, Hausa, Ibo, Wolof, and Yoruba. Of course, these translations contain their ideological interpretations and slant.

Islam and Women in Africa

Muslims often claim that Islam offers women many rights and emancipates them from the Arab's atrocities against them. Women's social and political conditions at the advent of Islam were horrible. They were considered second-class citizens and held no political or leadership positions in the community. Occasionally, at birth, men buried them alive to escape the shame of having a female member in the family.¹⁶ When they were allowed to survive, their male relatives had to give their consent before they got married. If they became widows, any male relatives of the husband could inherit them as they inherited any piece of property. Women could not participate in war or be part of the military. They were not respected as they should have been.

However, Prophet Muhammad removed most of the injustices that women experienced in Arabia. He condemned female infanticide, gave women the right to choose their husbands, and insisted that they could also inherit property as male descendants do. The Prophet limited the number of wives that a person could marry to four. He affirmed that God created men and women equal.¹⁷ He elevated their status in the community and occasionally sought their advice especially at Medina when he became the Head of State. Islam accorded women high regard and granted them many rights they did not enjoy before. But after the reign of the four Caliphs, their rights began to dwindle especially during the era of the Abbasid Empire. Up to today, women have not gained back the rights they had in the first centuries of Islam from 622–750 C.E.

Muslim women played little role if any in the conquest and spread of Islam and so far we do not have many records about the contributions of women to the spread of Islam in Africa. It is likely that they have not received credit for their contributions to the religion. In Africa, even among non-Muslims, women are the backbone of the community in farming, control and management of the markets, and domestic trading, yet little credit is given to them by the patriarchy of African society. Both men and women were taught basic knowledge about Islam, yet only men received advanced knowledge; women were not fully allowed to teach or learn in public or even hold public Islamic positions except on rare occasions.

During Colonial rule, Muslims did not send their females to missionary schools and the few who did stopped them after high school. As a result, Muslim women lag behind

in education up to today. Islam theoretically favors the patriarchy system and that has affected negatively the role and status of women. Islam itself encourages women to be educated, developed, and progressive, yet the males do not give them an ample chance to develop themselves. Some women believe that change will come when women take charge of things themselves. No country or people can attain progress and success if one half of its population is uneducated regardless of whatever natural resources that country possesses. In countries where Muslims are in the majority, like Mali, Senegal, Mauritania, Sudan, Northern Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Somalia, women are invisible in the public sectors because they receive less education and hence they cannot compete with men for public jobs.

It would be fair to say that Muslim women are not better off today in African Muslim countries because of the cultural and societal restrictions exerted upon them by the community. Even though Islam does not prevent them from learning and working, the restrictions imposed upon them by Muslim scholars do not accord them enough freedom to educate themselves and work in the public domain. Therefore, many people mistakenly think that Islam blocks women's progress when neither the Qur'an nor the Sunnah of the Prophet prevents women from acquiring knowledge or working. Muhammad's wife, Khadijah, was a great merchant at Mecca. She employed Muhammad before she finally married him. Sheikh Uthman Dan Fodio of the Sokoto Caliphate in West Africa was taught the Qur'an by his mother, and his daughter, Nana Hawa Asmau, was a great scholar and poet. Today women attend secular and religious schools in Africa more than before. Restrictions imposed on them are gradually being revised. There is a great hope that African Muslim women will take their legitimate positions in their community in the twenty-first century. The more they learn about their religion, the better they become aware of their legitimate rights and roles in society.

Female Circumcision (Female Genital Mutilation)

One of the major issues affecting women's sexuality in Africa is the issue of female circumcision (known today as female genital mutilation) among Muslim women. Islam as a religion does not endorse this practice. It is a cultural practice in many African countries like Egypt, Somalia, Northern Nigeria, and other places. Africans practiced female circumcision before the advent of Islam. Islam does not require circumcision for a female before or after marriage. It has no merit whatsoever even though those who practice it in rural areas in Egypt, Senegal, and Sudan consider it a badge of honor and a sign of loyalty to their potential husbands. However, the harm that accrues from it renders its practice unfavorable and hence it should be banned as some countries in Africa have done.

Islam and Terrorism in Africa

Terrorism, the act of inciting fear or using violence and causing harm to others to win a political point or draw public attention to an issue,¹⁸ has no room in Islam. However,

fighting for one's right, defending one's property, protecting one's country, and safeguarding one's belief are all legitimate endeavors in Islam.¹⁹ Therefore, Africans' struggles and fights for the independence of their countries were legitimate struggles regardless of whatever it has been called by others. Yet, the colonial rulers considered those fights by Africans to free themselves from the yoke of oppression as acts of terrorism. It is hypocritical to consider an invasion of another country an act of liberation, while resistance to the same invasion by the occupied people is perceived as an act of terrorism. The Mau-Mau war against the British in East Africa in 1950s, the Algerian war against the French in North Africa in 1960s, and the Mahdi war against the Egypt-British government in 1890s were wars of liberation and not terrorism on any account. Every person has the right to free him/herself from the oppressions of others, just as the Americans exercised their right to free themselves from the tyranny of the British in the seventeenth century. No one viewed such wars of liberation as acts of terrorism except the oppressors.²⁰

Islam as a religion does not teach or endorse terrorism in any form and those who engage in acts of terrorism must be held responsible for their actions. Muslims believe that their religion teaches peaceful co-existence with others. However, a few Muslims around the world do not practice Islam but cause problems and create fear in the hearts of millions of innocent people. This group expresses its anger against its enemies through unhealthy channels hoping to get the attention of the public and of the media in particular. However, what everyone has to recognize is the fact that violence will never lead to peace.

The notion of terrorism is now growing in Africa with the Embassy Bombings in Kenya, Tanzania, the Somali crisis, and the attempts by Omar Farouq Abdul Mutallib to bomb a Northwest Airline Flight on December 25, 2009. However, the war in Sudan is not caused by religion even though religion is introduced into it today. The kidnapping of foreign oil workers in the Delta area in Eastern Nigeria results from the unfair distribution of the oil resources. The leader of the Delta group (MEND), Mr. M. Asari, asserted that his people are not fighting for religion. They are fighting the Nigerian government and foreign companies that have ignored the area, contaminated their soil with chemicals, and have not attempted to clean up their chemical waste; they do not invest and develop the area. In Egypt, the Muslims who attacked Americans and foreign tourists were expressing their anger and frustration against their own government and the American government, which support the police state of Egypt where democracy has no foundation whatsoever. Not all these so-called terrorists are engaging in these activities to promote Islam but to condemn the ill-treatment they received from their governments and to make a political point.

Having said that, it is unfortunate that the terrorists in Africa possess tons of destructive weapons, rifles, and machine guns; yet they do not manufacture any of these sophisticated weapons. They bought or received them from European, American, or Russian companies and manufacturers or from the super-powers through different channels and dubious agents. While the Somalis and the *Janjawid* in Sudan lack money for food for their families, they wrap themselves up with weapons worth thousands of dollars to destroy themselves and their people. Such a supply in our view amounts to

an act of terrorism against humanity and against innocent people who do not know why they are fighting. These fighters teach young children to fight rather than to read or write. The wars in Darfur, Eritrea, Somalia, East Africa, and Western Sahara are not religious but ethnic wars instigated occasionally by the fight for equitable distribution of resources.

The groups that engage in acts of terrorism employ religion to make a political point, as in the Maitansine uprising in January 1980 in Kano, Northern Nigeria. Several years ago, the Nigerian scholar Usman Bala suggested that the Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio in Northern Nigeria in the early nineteenth century was not religiously motivated but was really a fervent attempt by the Fulani to control Hausa wealth and resources, which actually happened after the victory of Uthman Dan Fodio. The Fulani became the leaders in all conquered territories in Northern Nigeria and they continue to rule until today.

The Future of Islam in Africa

Islam is an indigenous religion in Africa and observers think it has good prospects there. First, its practices are conducive to the social and family life of Africans, who do not feel alienated from their community when they become Muslims. Second, its doctrines are simple to absorb and free of theological complication or metaphysical argument. Most people can embrace and follow its five pillars. Third, about 90–95% of African Muslims are Sunni, indicating that there is not a strong revolutionary streak in African Islam. Fourth, Islam has contributed tremendously to literacy in Africa. Finally, Islam continues to meet the needs of the people. It will flourish because Africans always embrace things that are beneficial to the community. They worship and commit themselves to any tradition because of the benefit they derive from it. However, African Muslims in a new global climate must promote peaceful coexistence and change their negative attitude towards indigenous and other religions. Islam has a majority population in Africa.

Notes

- 1 Abd al-Rahman Azzam, *The Eternal Message of Muhammad*, translated from the Arabic by Ceasar E. Farah. (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), pp. 73–100; Martin Ling, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1983).
- 2 Fred M. Donner, “Muhammad and the Caliphate,” in *The Oxford History of Islam*, edited by John Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 1–62.
- 3 Sulayman Nyang, *Islam, Christianity and African Identity*. (Brattleboro, VT: Amana Books, 1984), p. 33.
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 28–32.

- 5 There are many activities being pursued today, especially by the USA Library of Congress, to revive the legacy of Timbuktu as an international center. Many of the old books are now archived and digitized for future editing and printing.
- 6 See Hadith of the Prophet's farewell speech at Arafah. See Adil Salahi, *Muhammad: Man and Prophet, A Complete Study of the Life of the Prophet of Islam* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1995), pp. 721–3.
- 7 Ibid:28.
- 8 Yushau Sodi, "The Practice of Islam," in *Understanding Yoruba Life and Culture*, edited by N.S. Lawal, Matthew N.O. Sadiku, and P. Ade Dopamu. (New Jersey: African World Press, Inc., 2004), pp. 137–51.
- 9 In January 2011, the Southern Sudan people decided to be a separate country as they voted to secede from Northern Sudan. Most of the tensions in Southern Sudan arise from tribal wars and the fight for resources.
- 10 For more information see: Sulayman Nyang, *Islam, Christianity and African Identity*, pp. 47–52; Yushau Sodi, "Islam in Practice," in *Understanding Yoruba Life and Culture*, edited by N.S. Lawal, Matthew N.O. Sadiku, and P. Ade Dopamu. (New Jersey: African World Press, Inc., 2004), pp. 137–51.
- 11 There is a dearth of literature on slavery by Islamic scholars. See "The Role of Islam in African Slavery: Using Slaves on the African Continent," by Alistair Boddy-Evans, at: www.about.com; accessed on June 10, 2009. On Sub-Saharan Slavery, see Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). See also Humphrey J. Fisher, *Slavery in the History of Muslim Black Africa* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).
- 12 There is often news stating that slavery goes on in Mauritania today. The UN is trying to put an end to it.
- 13 For more information of Islamic education in Africa, see Peter B. Clarke, *West Africa and Islam: A Study of Religious Development from the 8th to the 20th Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982); Peter B. Clarke and Ian Linder, *Islam in Modern Nigeria: A Study of a Muslim Community in a Post-Independence State, 1960–1983* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1984).
- 14 Humphrey J. Fisher, *Ahmadiyyah: A Study in Contemporary Islam on the West African Coast* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), published for the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research.
- 15 On Ahmadiyyah Movement see Ismail Balogun, "Why Did I Renounce Ahmadiyyah," an article published on the web at: <http://thetruereligion.org/modules/testimonies/item.php?itemid=200> (accessed on June 15, 2009; see also, Ismail Balogun, "Islam vs. Ahmadiyyah in Nigeria," in *Sunday Sketch*, September 29, 1974, pp. 85–6.
- 16 See Lamya al-Faruqi, *Women, Muslim Society and Islam* (Indianapolis, Indiana: American Trust Publications, 1988).
- 17 See Qur'an ch 49:13; ch 4:1–2; see also the farewell sermon of the Prophet at Mount Arafah in Adil Salahi, *Muhammad: Man and Prophet* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1995), pp. 720–2.
- 18 See Mark Juergenmeyer's works on terrorism like *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), *Global Religions: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), as well as many of his articles.

- 19 Jihad means struggling and striving to be a better person. Today when the Egyptians, Tunisians and Libyans fight to free themselves from the tyranny of their leaders, they are making Jihad and they should never be called rebels or terrorists as the media are used to calling them.
- 20 It is ironic that the Iraqi people had nothing to do with the attack of September 11, and that in the war with the United States the issue is terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

CHAPTER 23

Women in Islam

Between Sufism and Reform in Senegal

Penda Mbow

Translated by Ghislaine Lydon

The subject of women and Islamic practice in a country such as Senegal brings up three areas of consideration. The first is the perception of women and their assigned space in Senegalese Islam. The second is the religious innovations that women have introduced in defiance of a male preserve. The third is the challenge Senegalese society encounters when faced with the recent call for a change in the status of women. One facet of this debate revolves around the dialectics of Islam and democracy and human rights. Since the 1980s, Senegalese women are at the heart of a religious discourse between the secular state and the personal status code. The question remains: Can the Islamic traditions of the seventh century be adapted to contemporaneous Muslim societies in an increasingly technological society, the debate on democracy and secularism; liberalism, women's rights; and the hermeneutics of texts and the resurgence of personal interpretation of Islamic law? These issues are explored in light religious pluralism in Senegal where Roman Catholicism and a veritable dialogue has long existed between different religious communities beginning with the Presidency of Léopold Sedar Senghor who was Catholic, and continuing with succeeding presidents.

Senegal has also faced economic crisis that has affected every sector of the country. Political elections have come to include considerations of new social movements, including soccer, and constant engagement of political leaders with Touba, the capital of the Murid Brotherhood. This came to a head during the 2002 municipal elections in Touba when the political coalition known as CAP 21¹ became favored. The ephemeral character of this action does not erase the close identification of the Murid Brotherhood with the President's party, which has caused great consternation because it has led to unbalanced treatment of religious issues in the media. There is also an on-going debate about the involvement of women in society. Thus, it is necessary that a pluralistic approach determine attempts to establish a prosperous state that espouses Republican values and takes into account religious questions, Islamic reforms, and the status and vocation of women in Islam. This chapter is organized in three parts. The first is a

discussion of Senegalese Islam's perception of women. Then, I examine the case of Ndiaye Mody Guirandu as a significant example of a Senegalese woman's religious vocation. Finally, in the last section I discuss the feminist reform movement in Senegal.

The Perception of Women in Senegalese Islamic Practice

The Nature of Senegalese Islam

The Islamization of Senegal follows closely the patterns in Western Sudan where through trans-Saharan trade, Islam remained confined to the urban elite and to royal courts. Today more than 94% of the Senegalese population in a secular state is Muslim, and this regulates the collective psychology of the people. Muslim Brotherhoods play an important role in Senegalese Islam and each Brotherhood addresses the question of the status of women differently although they claim to draw their conclusions from similar Islamic religious texts and traditions. Understanding the place of women calls for examining the revealed texts in the Qur'an, the Sunna of the Prophet, and the *hadith* that has come from followers of the Prophet and his widow, A'isha, that define normative behavior. Interpretations differ according to different branches of Islam (Sunni, Shi'ite, and Khariji), and the four legal schools (Shafi'i, Hannafi, Hanbali, and Maliki). In Senegal, the Brotherhoods have incorporated gender into their discourses with aims varying from promoting the importance of mothers in African societies, to responding to the dynamism of women in social and economic life. Differences remain even among the female elite in the *marabout* families, who reinforce the presence of women in the social consolidation of brotherhoods. Many women have joined religious associations or *dahira*, and they are the backbone of brotherhoods who mobilize religious disciples or *talibés*. Indeed, women manifest their religious zeal and fervor in celebrations such as the *Gamou* (celebrates the birth of the Prophet Muhammad or the different nights dedicated to him, or in chants they do daily), worship, and their financial and material participation in religious events. Women work through associations that are spaces of conviviality to combat idleness, provide solidarity, and discuss matrimonial issues.

Islam in Senegal and other places in West Africa is defined by religious figures who have shaped thought and led revivals. Since the eleventh century, West African Islam has seen the rise of the jihad of the Almoravids and other reform movements. With the rise of feminist discourse from the 1980s, reform movements increasingly have taken on a feminine expression. For example, young female cadres have started a new cult named after Mame Diarra Bousso, the mother of Cheick Ahmadou Bamba, the founder of the Murid Brotherhood. Mame Diarra Bousso's place of birth, Porokhane, has become a pilgrimage site along with a cult roughly mirroring the ritual pilgrimage to Mecca. The maternal family of the Serigne Touba, as Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba is called, benefits from this attention to counterbalance the hegemony of the town of Touba, the sacred burial site of the Murid leader, which is embodied by members of the Mbacké family or the paternal side of the founder of the brotherhood. The phenomenon of Mama Diarra Bousso reflects the liveliness of African matriarchy institutions.

Senegalese Brotherhoods

Three large brotherhoods exist in the Senegalese Muslim space:

- 1 The *Qadiriyya*: The most ancient and most widespread brotherhood in Senegal, established at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Its religious center is located in Ndiassane (some 80 km from the capital Dakar). Mauritanian *cheikhs* were responsible for its spread. It is the only brotherhood that allowed women to rise to the dignified position of *cheick*, capable of initiating others into the brotherhood or acting as a representative of the caliph.
- 2 The *Tijaniyya*: Also originally arrived from Mauritania but spread in Senegal through the activities of Senegalese Muslim chiefs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These leaders were often of Hal-Pulaaren origin, such as al-Hadj 'Umar Tall, Maba Diakhou Bâ, al-Hadj Malick Sy, and al-Hadj Ibrahima Niasse. Since the colonial period, the Tijani members have come from the most progressive segment of Senegalese society. They have demonstrated tolerance to women in the Niassène area because women like Sokhna Mariama Niasse from elite families became teachers in the Quranic schools. Elsewhere, in Tivaouane, female personalities such as Sokhna Astou Kâne, the wife of Babacar Sy, were influential authorities who directed family succession for the control of the brotherhood.
- 3 The *Muridiyya*: Founded by Cheick Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké, is linked to the Wolof world in which it was born. Its leader, Ahmadou Bamaba, has been turned into a saint and followers have now created a sacred space for his mother, Mame Diarra. However, some Murid iconoclastic practice has received little scholarly attention. For example, religious dignitaries marry sometimes up to ten wives without raising public criticism; even Senegalese feminists rarely confront the issue. This complacency merits a study of mores, conditions of succession, women's psychology, and the conditions they endure as women and wives of marabouts (Muslim religious leaders) in a context of unlimited polygamy where women are often given as gifts (*hadiya*) to religious dignitaries.

Other religious groups include the Layènes whose influence is limited to the Lébou group in the Dakar peninsular. Being a small group, they have encouraged women's involvement in the daily organization, and women play a primary role in chants and popular mobilization. The Layène caliphs seek an egalitarian approach to attract a female clientele. These Layènes are located at opposite spectrum of the other minority religious group, the Médina Gounass. The Tijanis, followers of Thierno Barro, of the Médina Gounass are *halpulaar* who promote a certain status for women, but limit their societal roles to wives and mothers. Women members are secluded in a compound reserved for them and their pre-pubescent children. They are not permitted to participate in religious manifestations such as the *Dakka*, or periods of spiritual retreat.

In addition to important Sufi male leaders, some women have distinguished themselves by playing important religious roles by their daily control of the family com-

pound.² Some strive to live according to the Sufi way. Historically, Sufism was interpreted as an individual revolt against the power of the Umma or the community of believers. Hence, Sufism allows for the fructifying of the spiritual message of Prophet Muhammad, for the personal quest to relive, through introspection, the modalities, and content of the Quranic revelation. The *Mira'j*, or ecstatic assumption during which the Prophet was initiated to the divine secrets, remains the prototype of the sought Sufi experience, a protest and testimony to uphold the spiritual traditions of Islam as a universal and liberating religion.

Islam in Senegal has given birth to many ritual practices, which some find strange, such as the emotional outbursts at the sight of an effigy of a charismatic figure (even one who has long passed away); the need to bury the dead near the burial site of a saint; and the practice of associational life or *shirk* in Islam. Preaching the Word remains an important practice since a large number of people and especially women (70%) remain illiterate. Sermons are communicated through radio, with “the woman” being a favorite theme of some preachers. This intense focus on women responds to the irruption of women in the public arena. It is also a desire to dominate and bring conservative interpretation of texts on the discourse on women. In the 1990s, feminist pressure caused the state to censure a presenter who used the Qur’an to advocate wife-beating on a religious television show. The irony is that conservative female presenters also employ neo-conservative rhetoric to blame feminists for demanding more freedoms and rights for women.

Women’s Sufi Experience: The Phenomenon of Ndiaye Mody Guirandu

The phenomenon of Ndiaye Mody must be placed within the context of studies on the status of women to understand her movement and the charges of heresy against her.³ While Ndiaye Mody defines herself as a superior saint, many suspect she is pretending. Indeed, an analysis of her discourse reveals a fundamental contradiction between the perception Muslims hold about prophecy, on the one hand, and the vocation of Ndiaye Mody, on the other. Only prophets experience the visits of angels, and like Muhammad, representing the seal of all Prophets, Ndiaye Mody claims to have received orders from Angel Gabriel, which clearly contradicts the spirit of Islam.

I discuss the phenomenon of Ndiaye Mody, by analyzing a text entitled “A biography of Allah,” which she wrote and shared with me. The text, which is original in style, covers the Prophet’s birth, his first foundational experiences, and his complete illumination. In the text, God addresses the reader in the first person and everything pertaining to God is written in red ink: a symbolic color in the mysticism of Ndiaye Mody. Our information is derived essentially from the content of this text, a series of conversations with Ndiaye Mody as well as the testimonies of her sister and her daughter. Her life is marked by a series of initiations: eleven small imitations, four larger ones, and a grand initiation.

Ndiaye Mody is a retired journalist who followed a western education and was never initiated to the Qur’an:

I tried in vain without ever succeeding. We received our big inspiration, which introduced me to the Qur'an. From that moment onwards, I began to translate the Qur'an for the first time . . . the inspiration occurred in 1986, but before that time, I had visions. Following these visions, I had the visit of Angel Saidina Jibril (Angel Gabriel) who came to relay information on the Dhikr, that is to say the invocation of the names of Allah, until the day of my grand initiation . . .⁴

The phenomenon of Ndiaye Mody Guirandu has generated justifiable interdisciplinary attention. Given the religious history of Senegal, one wonders if the Ndiaye Mody phenomenon could be regarded as a new form of Sufism or a new form of the Mudjadidd. Although a hermeneutic framework to analyze the situation is limited, the Ndiaye Mody phenomenon has the potential of generating a fruitful discussion about the Senegalese imagery especially when correlated to an examination of the on-going search for a supernatural order, which makes one wonder if such things could provide a rapprochement between the present and the past. The fact that a woman makes these claims also makes the phenomenon important and offers an opportunity to examine the place of women in Islam.

Following the inspiration of the angel, Mody Ndiaye has taken positions on different aspects of Islam. For instance on the Zakat, the Muslim tithe, she calls for a new approach. Does her case fit Achille Mbembe's argument that one could explain dissident and segmentary religious movements by framing the profane into the sacred the theological and divine meanings "remaining on the other side of the material arguments?" (Mbembe 1993:177–501)⁵

Preoccupations with materiality are not absent from Ndiaye Mody's discourse, even if she presents no immediate remedial solutions. Apparently, Angel Gabriel revealed to her: "one day you shall have a topaz ring. You will receive it from the hands of Saidina Muhammad; he will bestow upon you great fortune . . . You will have much wealth, you will die in Medina." Ndiaye Mody is not indifferent to the fate of the pauper and that is why her position on the Zakat is a novel call for change. She argues that the Zakat should be levied monthly on salaries instead of at the end of the Muslim year. She proposes to be in charge of redistribution. Ndiaye Mody's position reflects the view that religious expression often reflects a given historical and social situation. Sometimes it is a tangible realization of a religious nature, inscribed within a temporal and spatial context or a "basic religious attitude," which alone can serve to explain external manifestations of the religious experience such as Ndiaye Mody's movement.

Ndiaye Mody also preaches in the tradition of contemporary Senegalese preaching, which uses mass media and the airing of religious talks or the commemorations of the *Gamou* (Mawlid an-Nabi or birth of the Prophet Muhammad). In a society where many of the devotees do not read the Arabic script, a small group of learned scholars has assumed the privilege of articulating Islamic thought. Some are trained in western schools (namely certain members of the Cercle d'études et de recherches islamiques de Dakar—CERID, where former militant Marxists, members of liberal professions, the Muslim students of the University of Dakar) and others enrolled in the Islamic Universities of Cairo (Al Azhar), or Fez (Qayrawan). The diverse nature of the centers of learning and their aims find expression in the new wave of Islamic thought in Senegal, which

is also a mark of its vibrancy. If there is a debate here, it is not between knowledge and ignorance, or the refusal of *ijtihād* for the interpretation of certain religious texts such as the Qur'an and the *hadiths*, but involves the monopoly over religious discourse maintained by several gatekeepers, namely the families of *marabouts*. Ndiaye Mody's innovation lies in her particular manner of addressing the social problems people face at a time when people are introducing new methods of reflection.

Ndiaye Mody represents a doctrine and a moral path that responds to the needs of a religious élite. As a woman, she has fought for the right to preach as an essential component of her religious vocation. One may also wonder if her desire to teach to people is a *prise de conscience* of her role as a learned scholar in a society characterized by ignorance and obscurantism. Or, rather, could it be due to her early encounter as a child with Christianity (her mother being Christian)? In Christianity, public speech is an important way of articulating ideas on a life that imitates the prophetic trajectory of Christ; whereas for Muslims, knowledge is directly related to application of writing for learning. The Angel Gabriel exhorted Prophet Muhammad to read; while for Ndiaye Mody, the inspiration came from God. One could also wonder, given the fact that she claims to have acquired literacy in Arabic not through a systematic education but through religious inspiration, could it be that Ndiaye Mody is on a quest to mimic the itinerary of Prophet Muhammad! For she is obsessed with the idea that "Muslims [have been] misled by several centuries of false interpretations and mistranslations." Does her position reflect a demystification of the Arabic language considered sacred by most Muslims?

The problem of the "specialization of thought," developed by Jacques le Goff in his discussion of purgatory, is of prime importance in Ndiaye Mody's thinking. Aside from the evocation of unreal spaces such as the Massin—beyond Paradise—the entire landscape of Senegal is involved in the network of relationships that Ndiaye Mody has built around her movement. She has efficiently established what seems like "a spatialization of thought, an essential dialectical approach of Christian values . . . at the same time, it precludes the possibility of illuminating a decisive period and a profound mutation of society, the possibility of detecting, [as] with the belief in the purgatory, a phenomenon of larger significance in the history of ideas and the history of mentalities: the process of the spatialization of thought."⁶

Several scholars have recently shed light on the importance of the notion of space and such reflection could be applied to symbolic spatial geography. For example, E.T. Hill argues that territories are an extension of the animal or human organism, and that this perception of space is predicated on culture and the view that territorial dimensions represent an internalization of space as organized in thought. This is an important realization concerning individuals and societies.⁷ Ndiaye Mody's spatialization is apparent in several ways. Her narrative traces the migratory spaces of her two families in a way that is emblematic of the entire Senegalese territory as presently defined. Even if she used the terms of historical geography such as the Baol, or the Cayor, she is clearly incorporating the modern dimensions of the Senegalese territory in her religious narrative. Moreover, the use of terminology from Saint-Louis, a colonial administrative creation, is further proof of this approach. While it is easy to identify the names of the races, and places which she evokes in her texts, her historical references remain vague:

“her father is a descendant of the Seck of the Cayor region, who came to settle in the Baol and the Cayor, after a bloody Jihad between the people of Louga and the people of Saint-Louis.” It is important to recall that conflict has also been a part of the relationship of the inhabitants of Saint-Louis (the seat of the colonial administration) and those in the province of Ndiambour reputed for their religious erudition. Mody Ndiaye’s genealogy also mixes the populations of Senegal. The Wane of the Futa region (in northern Senegal) would be from the Lower Casamance region. It is in the Futa region that numerous Muslim reformers of Senegal were born. The Mudjaddid, even if they may only appear in times of crisis, she often puts into question Islamic dogma as well as the notion of *Ijtihad*.

Ndiaye Mody’s eschatological thought rests on a symbolic connection to a place that lies beyond Paradise; the existence of the real or the supposed of Massin is denoted by the uneasiness of Ndiaye Mody to preach in a country completely closed by traditional Islamic tenets. Her manner of spatializing her thought in the symbolic reflects the difficulties she faces in bringing everything to cohere in her grand narrative. However, in light of the prevailing conditions in Senegalese society, her handicap may be a factor of sexism or her physical condition (she often evokes her corpulence). Therefore, the challenges she faces may not only focus on the content of her discourse, which many consider heretical, but on other issues such as gender in a society where preachers use their sermons to control women. We can shed more light on her narrative by looking at her story.

Ndiaye Mody Guirandu’s Discourse

Her Biography Ndiaye Mody invokes the voice of God for details about her biography: “I created Sokhna Xadijah Tourah Alias Marième Ndiaye on March 13, 1833. She was born on April 11, 1935 at 8:35 PM, to a Catholic mother from Casamance.” The transcendentalism of her birth narratives are intended to legitimize her history. Her mother was Marie Ndella: a Christian and a granddaughter of the Prophet who became a saint in her tomb, thanks to the benediction of her daughter Ndiaye Mody. One of the most distinguishing factors in Ndiaye Mody’s story is the changes in her name through the divine intercession of Angel Gabriel and Prophet Muhammad, to become Xadijah Tourah. Renaming is important in African Islam because it is sacred part of the conversion process, the purification rituals, and confers to the new convert a Muslim identity in the Islamic Umma. Yet, these supposedly Islamic names are pre-Islamic Arabian names. For Ndiaye Mody, her name change was the first important step in her Islamic transformation.

The second step involves a reconstruction of her genealogy. Whether symbolic or fictive, the connection to a supposed race of Prophet Muhammad guarantees access to Paradise and a new superiority in the Muslim hierarchy. The father of Xadijah Tourah was originally from Djolof, and belonged to the last race of Prophet Muhammad according to the text that further insists that her ancestor was Prophet Muhammad himself, her father being a direct descendant of the superior Saint Hussein.

For Ndiaye Mody, belonging to this prestigious Sharif line confers a special status in West Africa that goes beyond a symbolic domain. In her view, conquests enabled the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad to migrate to various regions and thereby spread their noble blood throughout the world. Ndiaye Mody claims that she obtained confirmation of her Sharifian lineage from the mouth of the Prophet himself who conveyed to her: "I am your father, I was sent to tell you . . ." Such genealogical reconstructions are not new in Africa. Cheikh Anta Diop criticized the practice in *l'Afrique noire pré-coloniale*, calling it a tendency to engage in "Sharifism." Such attempts to find ancestors from the Quraysh line has been at the heart of numerous manipulations of genealogies, oral traditions, and legends in Africa, which renders the tasks of historians all the more difficult. Ndiaye Mody's version of Sharifism is in contradiction with the type of occultation she makes of the existence of the Kunta, a group that also ignores her presence entirely. Yet, the Kunta, be they from the regions of Adrar, Assaba, or Tagant, or the towns of Timbuktu or Ndiassane, have a capacity to retrace their genealogies directly to Arab ancestors. In fact, most Kunta claim direct descendancy from Uqba ben Nafi al-Fihri, the Quraysh of the Umayyad, and are recognized as such in ancient texts.⁸

Ndiaye Mody's discourse demonstrates a destruction of the Sharifian monopoly held by certain families or could demystify the Sharifian hegemony. For her, belonging to the Umma goes beyond the simple formulaic Shahada because it involves a family dimension. At a certain level, one could argue that Ndiaye Mody finds herself a prisoner of the values of her own universe. Her bold claims that she belongs to the universal blood of the Prophet conflicts with her own emphasis on her distinctive cultural background and other aspects of her narrative that explains her invocation of the mystical figure of Ndiadiane Ndiaye, the founder of the Djolof Kingdom (fifteenth century) who was, as was her first husband, of Berber origin.

Ndiaye Mody's staunchest critics argue that she commits the most sacrilegious act as a Muslim in identifying herself with the Prophet. However, she follows tradition because this view of Sufism has dominated Muslim Africa. Ahmad Ibn Idris, the influential Sufi of the eighteenth century, argued that there were two kinds of Sufi leaders: those who obtained their faith through learning, such as scholars and philosophers, and those to whom God was revealed. Those who received a direct revelation from God possess a deeper knowledge of the faith and such believers are capable of understanding the message and will not go beyond the instructions conveyed from beyond.⁹ According to Louis Brenner, Ben Idriss' position is central to Sufi thought.¹⁰ God continues to manifest himself, through supernatural appearances, visions, and revelations, to a select group of chosen ones. During her grand initiation, Angel Gabriel whispered to Ndiaye Mody that he was sent to give her a message about submission, the submission like that of a slave to the master, except that this would be submission to the Lord, Master, and King of Kings. The angel told Ndiaye Mody that she would undergo deprivation of food, endure obligatory and temporary fasting and be attached completely to the Lord.

Those who attack Ndiaye Mody's position may not fully understand the Sufi tradition, which even Ibn Khaldun discussed.¹¹ Yet it is not easy to situate Ndiaye Mody within the tradition, especially when she defines herself as a superior Saint, "the top

brass (decorated with 28 metals) as was her grand-father, Prophet Muhammad, among other Prophets.”

Among the followers of Ndiaye Mody Guirandu, the so-called “Islamidians,” *Dhikr* is of central importance as it lies at the heart of Sufi spirituality. In her text, Ndiaye Mody explains that during her third grand initiation, the Prophet Muhammad visited her and told her that Allah a messenger to help the devoted start a grand initiation. The messenger called the devoted to follow the inspired Fiqh, and read page 15 of the Holy Quran and carry out the commands prescribed in the text. Up to this point, Ndiaye Mody’s Sufi path fits the established tradition, as she receives the word from Prophet Muhammad directly. The innovations that she introduces are characteristic of each Sufi *tariqa*, and have to do with the description of the prayers and the content of the Sufi litanies (or *Dhikr*). She identifies a Sufi *silsila* or chain, having received visits of Prophet Muhammad at age eight, the visit of the founder of the Muridiyya, Cheick Ahmadou Bamba at age eleven, the visit of Prophet Ibrahima, and so forth. The centrality of *Dhikr* is reinforced by the mystical and the number of prayers, as expressed in the assertion that prophets have been sent to transmit the moral virtues of the Quran. Ndiaye Mody also claims that Allah has sent 10,000 angels to sing the psalms of Allah’s Names to her. Jinns were also sent to do the “Ba Yatoul Ridwane” with Ndiaye Mody as a witness. Forty thousand *rawanes* were also sent to whisper divine Names in her ear. Allah sent fairies to extend to Ndiaye Mody a hand of solidarity, and also sent 10,000 creatures to perform their *Bayatoul Ridwane* with Ndiaye Mody as witness.

One remarks the repetition of the number 10,000, which is quadrupled, while the number 160,000 is a quadruple of four (why 160,000?). Once she is accepted as a *Waliya* or *saint*—she defines herself as a superior saint, as noted earlier—she holds the same prerogatives as any other saint, namely the power to intercede between God and the people to solve their problems.¹²

Citing the *Rimah* of Umar Ben Sa’id, Brenner defines the Sufi saint’s relationship to God by insisting on the passivity of the latter. The motivation of the individual should be on spiritual exercises, while the transformation of their state comes from the intervention of God. Once God has accepted an individual as a *Wali*, he will continue to inspire his every move. For Ndiaye Mody, the inspiration takes on an exceptional dimension for she is inspired by God in her every move. Even the calendar dictating the fast, her timetable, her manner of performing prayer, ablutions, and the content of the muezzin’s call for prayer are all divinely inspired. To the point that her detractors decry that her approach contains too much *bida* or innovations and they cry “Stop this heresy!”. They argue that her inspiration is of a satanical origin because she claims inspiration that is difficult to establish. Ndiaye Mody claims that Allah calls her the servant surrounded with the Surat Law *Ansalna* and texts which discuss how the Quran descended to earth. Allah also inspired Ndiaye Mody’s memory with Surat *Likhls* (*Al Ikhlās*, Surat 112), the Surat on the Divine Oneness, gave all the names of the God of Light, called her, and she answered Allahou Labeyka three times. Allah then protected Ndiaye Mody and she smiled and promised to be faithful to the Lord.

Like all founders of a Sufi order, Ndiaye Mody seeks to turn her personal experience into a model of behavior to be emulated. For this reason, she entertains very close relations with her followers, especially her *talibés*, during meetings, prayer sessions, and

Dhikr sessions in her house. Moreover, she relies on modern technology for the creation of a chain of transmission (*silsila*) to develop her tariqa, including the publication of a journal.

It is too early to fully assess the impact or extent of Ndiaye Mody's Sufi movement. But the numbers of followers that show up at her house for the Friday prayer give some indication of her popularity. Moreover, she receives numerous visitors who come to consult her via *al-Ikshar*. Moreover, another important characteristic of Ndiaye Mody's Sufi way is her passivity. From age eight, she received her first visions, although she was too young to be fully conscious of God. Hence, her relationship with God was not due to a personal search, for she was chosen, and she insists on this fact, arguing that at that time, "she crawled (on the floor) in tears, crying Tassylarah [*Istasfarulah?*]"

Her Thought A good point of departure for analyzing Ndiaye Mody's thinking is the tenth-century philosopher Muhammad Arkoun's discussion of the Tawhid. Just like Ndiaye Mody, Arkoun was not recognized as a Sufi. Ndiaye Mody is neither a philosopher nor an Islamic implying that her case can only be understood within a Sufi framework based on the duality between the manifest or visible world (*zahir*) and the hidden or invisible world (*batin*). Since Al Arabi, Sufi thinkers have credited the human soul with this duality, and God directly communicates the secrets of divine unity to the hidden soul or *batin*. This duality was characteristic of Shaykh Ahmad Tijani, Ahmad ben al Jabarti, who talked about the motley power, the king of kings affirmed in the Saintly Quran where Allah is called the One, the unique King in absolute unity. Ndiaye Mody claims that Allah has affirmed this transcendental power to her at least twenty times in her lifetime. Throughout most of her initiations, Angel Gabriel demanded that she cite, above all others, the Surat *Lixlass* or the Surat of divine unity.

Ndiaye Mody's perception of God is seemingly very profound, and is neatly summarized by a quest for "divine unity" (*Tawhid*). Countless times in her text, God's phrase is repeated: "I am the Unique King in his absolute unity Who says in the Quran : I am one." In her focus on divine unity, Ndiaye Mody distinguishes between Prophet Muhammad and God, even though the former's name contains one of the names of God. This particular aspect of her thinking has caused much confusion among Senegalese Muslims. They do not comprehend why she bestows "this new status to Prophet Muhammad." Yet for Ndiaye Mody, this is a way of reinforcing the notion of *Tawhid*.

The phenomenon of Ndiaye Mody is better understood when placed within the context of Senegalese society. While our aim here is not to place value judgments on Islamic practice, it is tempting to pose the following question: What explains the skeptical attitudes that a number of Senegalese hold towards Ndiaye Mody? Clearly, the fact that she is a woman complicates her situation. Achille Mbembe's remarks find particular resonance here: "above all, a familiar commerce with the image of faith, the regimes of the believable, have always taken place within and outside organized orthodoxies. The permanence of this commerce [lies] outside or on the outskirts. The formal institutions responsible for framing and administering the sacred which puts into question how reclassifications are taking place through a revival of religion." Under these circumstances, it is best to attempt to understand the conditions under which innovation is born, and how successive historical actors judge it.¹³

Ndiaye Mody and Religion by Women in Senegal

At age 30, Ndiaye Mody was working at a radio station. At first, she had trouble dealing with the staff there because of both her difficult character, and the fact that she had numerous visions was received with sarcasm. At age 40, she was promoted to the former job of a colleague as Chief of Service of the Inter Channel [*Donne des Precisions sur la station Senegalese*] radio station where she remained for thirteen years without a promotion. Two years before her retirement, she finally was appointed Bureau Chief of Stations although her job description remained the same. Then she fell sick and was hospitalized for six months in the cardiology department. The sickness was just one of the challenges that Ndiaye Mody encountered in her personal and professional life on her way to finding her spiritual path.

Her story indicates that the history of exceptional women sometimes begins with the threat of an imposed marriage. "As the Prophet relayed to her, you are a simple girl, you will ask God for good health, a simple, pleasant, life filled with many children, of patience and a last husband." Ndiaye Mody was married twice. Her first husband, to whom she bore no children, left her because of her frequent visions. Life with her second husband, a Muslim Cheikh of the Muridiyya brotherhood, was not any easier.

Although women face pressure from parents, friends, and suitors, certain women refuse to marry under pressure to pursue their spiritual aspirations. It is also the case that others are drawn to spirituality because of a failed marriage or the death of a husband. As in Ndiaye Mody's case, some women's spiritual vocations often lie at the heart of marital problems. Women like her often come to realize that a marriage is incompatible with their spiritual and practical aspirations. Such marriages can become unproductive as husbands, who tend to be excluded from their wife's religious worlds, turn hostile, complicating the development of their wife's vocations. Such women are sometimes depicted as children or as experiencing a precocious spirituality. Indeed, a common theme is the conflicted relationships between these women and their husbands and parents, especially their fathers, who judge them negatively because of their miscomprehension of their spiritual vocation. This is particularly true of men, who are generally lacking in spirituality, especially those men who, by virtue of their close association with these types of women, are relegated to a secondary position.

Women belonging to religious societies tend to organize their groups according to behavioral rules and regulations that define gender relations and spatial configuration in sacred places. Ndiaye Mody's existence is revolutionary because of her practical and dogmatic approach to religion. Her position allows her to be frank about her quest for a permanent (third) husband: a quest that does not seem to contradict her refusal to lead the prayer. As she explains, "I do not lead the prayers. I stay behind the men. I have an imam who directs the prayer. And since I am an inspired being, I correct him every time he makes a mistake." Indeed, the Quran states that it is inappropriate, indecent, and therefore improper for a woman to place herself in front of men to direct the prayer.¹⁴ Her position reflects a common feature of Senegalese religious life and coheres with religious innovation in which possession and spiritual ecstasy are seemingly more open to women than more formal or structured religious traditions. To be sure, Ndiaye

Mody's case is a perfect example of the possible religious transformations in a society undergoing rapid change. These changes have created new situations for women and religion that cannot be simplified.

Ndiaye Mody's case indicates that one ought to remember that neo-fundamentalists desire to change and give the impression that societies evolve in fear of the potential disorder that women could introduce through behaviors that are more liberal. In their thought, women appear, therefore, as passive beings, tributary to the goodwill of men, even for the obtainment of *baraka* (or divine blessing). On a larger scale, the recent debates concerning the reform of the Family Code in Senegal, advocated by Islamic associations, reveals a clear will to control women as well as Islam and civil liberties in Senegal. Here we will focus on the debate on civil liberties in Senegal and the effect on Islamic women.

Islam and Civil Liberties: Towards a Rearticulation of *Ijtihad*

Islam and Human Rights

During the twentieth century, great Muslim thinkers have applied themselves to examining human rights from the perspective of Islamic thought. These thinkers include Si Hamza Boubakeur, Ihsan Hamid al-Mafregy, Muhammad Hamidullah, Sinaceur, Ali Merad, Chahine, and Senegalese scholars such as El Hadj Rawane Mbaye. Most of their studies revolve around a triptych:

- What the founding values or sources of reflection and spirituality says about humanity's identity, his situation in the divine economy, the sense of his engagement.
- The slow conquest and the historical record of the stakes; the salient points of the debate to better confront the question of religion and human rights.
- The current struggles, the perspective of engagements, the meaning of the religious option for the defense and the spread of human rights throughout the world. Here the following themes are tackled: the definition of humanity, the respect of human dignity, freedom, political and individual freedom, individual rights (in life, education, ownership, etc.)

According to Emmanuel Hirsch, these three areas offer ways of undertaking a coherent approach to human rights, tracing its roots in tradition as well as modernity, its consciousness, ethics, and the imperative to hold a debate on these issues and human liberties.

Women's Rights

The Senegalese society is also experiencing great social permutations manifested in economic crisis and the crisis of values, which place women on the center stage in the same way as they are at the center of debates about modernity in Senegal. Women are

claiming better instruction, more decision-making positions, and are calling for a complete application of the democratic option. However, some continue to employ the sacred texts to curtail women's movement. Do women have to engage in Islamic exegesis in order to find the proper argumentation to defend their equal rights? Can they successfully argue, based on the classic texts, against polygamy and justify their parental authority? Under which conditions can Muslim women use contraception or claim their right to an abortion? This debate remains wide open.

Yet women are now capable of demonstrating the tension that remains between the forces of assimilation to modernity and the conservative nature of Islamic thought. Moreover, they can do so based on solid evidence because:

- The Qur'an bestowed to women, at the time, a superior legal status than other women in the world in the seventh century;
- Her fate varied from one country to the next;
- Until the mid-twentieth century, western life styles were scarcely different; the only difference being the level of female mobilization;
- Finally, in the struggle for emancipation, the targets of Muslim women are not so much the religion of Islam as local social structures and retarded mentalities.

A new reading of the classic texts in light of social evolvement is imperative. However, before turning to a discussion of *Ijtihad*, we must consider the debate revolving around the subject of women and Islam in Senegal. Under President Senghor, the secular nature of the State became further entrenched, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the elaboration of the Family Code. The project was initiated by the decree of April 12, 1961 under Mamadou Dia, the President of the Council. In 1965, Senghor designated a new committee to study the options regarding the Family Code. In 1972, after six years of work, they proposed the Family Code under the following organizational principles:

- The Unification of the Law;
- The forceful affirmation of the secular character of society;
- The recognition of the principle of individual rights and the principle of the equality of citizens.

The Islamic Superior Council strongly criticized the Family Code. The Caliph General of the Murids, Abdoul Ahad Mbacké, forbade the application of the Family Code throughout the territory of Touba where only the rule of God prevails.¹⁵ Moreover, in 1977, the president of the Supreme Court, Kéba Mbaye, rang the alarm when the Code was not applied rigorously at a time when the administration under Senghor rejected his position.¹⁶ Criticizing the Family Code is a favorite passtime of the Islamicists. Cheikh Abdoulaye Dièye, the leader of a religious party (FSD-BJ) never misses an opportunity to demand the abrogation of the Family Code. Today, there is a growing movement of Islamic associations demanded the application of a Family Code "inspired by Islam" which calls for the application of Shar'ia, the re-establishment of Muslim Tribunals, etc. In addition, the debate on limited polygamy introduced by the UNFPA in 1998, the

question of parental authority that women's association are demanding, and the struggle against violence committed towards women, all put into question the role of Islam as a founding collective ideology in this country. How can the requirements of the modern world and profound religious beliefs be reconciled? A return to the origins of methods of analysis in Islam is in order.

Conditions for a New Interpretation

In order to determine the status of women, one must recognize the textual dimensions of Islam as well as the history of Arab culture. Islam seems to revolve around three concentric circles. The first concerns the Islamic doctrine as elaborated in the scriptures, namely the Quran and the Sunna. Around this core, there is a second circle where lie the canonical interpretations, the various branches of Islam (Sunni, Shiite, Khariji), and the schools of Islamic law and doctrines (Sha'fi, Hanafi, Hanbali, and Maliki). The third and last concentric circle, which encloses the first two, includes all the pre-Islamic traditions as well as the pre-existing mores that are still practiced in the different regions, ethnicities, and histories. To commune with the first circle, Muslims diverge from the core the more they move away. On many questions of Islamic behavior, such as in the case of *mu'amalat* social relationships, one must consider these three different levels, since interpreting the sacred texts must take the evolution of societies into account.

In a remarkable interview given to *Jeune Afrique*¹⁷ Mohammad Talbi argued that all the sources of modern scientific knowledge had to be considered in order to resolve "certain conceptions conveyed by the dominant *imaginaire*." By this he referred to a certain incompatibility between Islam and secularism. Mohammad Talbi argues for the integrity of the Quranic message and adds: "I want to return the word to God against those who have acquired it and pretend to be its sole and infallible interpreters." Based on certain verses from the Quran, Talbi retorts that the Quran ordains the inequality of the sexes. He argues that answer lies in a global history of the Revelation of God. The famous verse from the Surat "The Women," where it is said that men have pre-eminence over women as long as they are the sole providers, is not an expression of approbation but of tolerance coupled with reprobation. By this, it is meant that at a certain moment in time, this tolerance will come to disappear since it was accorded under particular circumstances and the Legislator globally condemns that.

The Articulation of Islamic Law

Another instructive theme related to the debate on women in Senegalese society is the elaboration of Islamic law. The word "shar'ia" is translated into "sacred law," whereas *fiqh* is the science of Shar'ia. The Quran is the main source of Shar'ia, yet no book entitled "Shar'ia" exists! Numerous books have been written on the subject of *fiqh* throughout history: the *Muddawana* of Sahnun, the *Muwatta* by Imam Malik, the *Kitab al Umm* or the *Summation* of Shafi'i, the *Mukhtasar* of Khalil, or even closer to us,

the *Risala* (by Suyuti or rather al-Qarawani) or the *Mira'j as-Suud* by Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti.

Shari'a is often placed above the Islamic dogma even if it is based on the ensemble of legal prescriptions as studied by the *fuqaha* (*fiqh* being often translated as jurisprudence). The development of Muslim law began in the Abbasid period (from 750 onwards; the Prophet having passed away in 632). Faced with the growing complexity of regional conquests, judges, or *qadis*, could do little more than apply their thought to situations and provide opinions (*ra'y*). With the increasing contributions of non-Arab Muslims, they came up with the idea of a consensus among specialists, the *idjm'a* (which in reality, only has a private function). However, the multiplication of the *Hadiths* allowed for *Qiy's* or reasoning by way of analogy or comparison, which then became a third source of Islamic judicial thought. Generally speaking, *ijtihad* is applied to the personal reasoning exercised by the first scholars of Islamic law, in opposition to those who ruled in the previous times. In the Abbasid periods, the following scholars of Islamic law formed the four doctrines (*madhahib*) or schools.

Malik Ibn Anas formed the school of Medina (around 720–796). It grew from contacts with the Umayyad, and was attacked by the Abbassids. This school was very respectful of the customs and spirit of Medina, the town of the Prophet. Through conquest of Egypt, North Africa, and Spain, Maliki doctrine was supposed to rule throughout, but it became less frequently followed in the Middle East and even in Arabia.

Imam Shafi'i (767–820), born in Palestine, first considered himself a follower of Malik. But soon his following was compromised by his belonging to the Alid (the first appellation of the partisans of Ali who would become Shi'ites. He taught in Egypt and in Syria. His approach is the most conservative, representative of the traditionalists in the area of *fiqh*, which while prohibiting the exercise of opinion (*ra'y*), allows for the use of *qiyos* or logical deduction through analogy.

Abu Hanifa (699–767) was not Arab but a *Maula de Kufa* (in other words, of Persian origin. He was interested in practical problems, and this is why his disciples produced some of the more valuable works on Islamic law, among them Abu Yusuf Yakub, author of *Kitab al-Kha*, the book on land taxation.

Ibn Hanbal (780–855) came from an Arab family settled in Baghdad. He professed that all interpretations of the *Hadiths* that depart from their literal sense were to be avoided as much as possible. His position coincided with a time when *Hadiths* were increasing used and disseminated. Certain scholars saw in this proliferation the need for authentication of *Hadith*, which led to the birth of the method guaranteeing the chains of transmission or *Isnd* and the classification of the *Hadith* in which al-Bukhari and Muslim found their proper order.

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to show that Islam and Modernity are not incompatible. By way of *Ijtihad*, Islam allows for Muslims to engage in personal interpretation in order to better comprehend and translate the changing world in terms of space and time. In this sense, faith is not the abdication of intelligence; on the contrary, Islam is the

religion of knowledge. Yet Muslims are forever questioning the evolution of the family, the status of women, and the link between Islam and politics.

In the debate about the Family Code, Senegalese Christians and women's organizations have found a common platform. Together, they are developing arguments for maintaining the stability and secularism of the Senegalese State, and to strengthen citizenship. Social science theory has thus far proved inadequate for understanding the life and roles of women in religions. Yet, since ancient times, women have actively participated in religious practice. In the case of Ndiaye Mody, which we have examined, this religious agent seeks abstraction while placing great emphasis on the importance of symbolism in religious expression. Women inevitably must have a religious life, even if it may only be in response to certain ideals and expectations defined by men.

By assuming positions of authority normally held by men, can women act to improve the conditions of women? Does one have to see women's religious associations as marginal expressions? In what way do they represent a heuristic trend in the sexual division of labor and space of a given society? Do these expressions shed light on processes of imposition, control, and internalization of behavioral norms as they relate to gender relations? Women's roles with Muslim brotherhoods, which are much more significant than the literature admits, are typically justified in terms of folklore or attributed to a women's world characterized by ignorance.

Typically, Muslim societies are depicted as austere and devoid of emotional religious expression. Yet, this view is altogether erroneous as far as Senegal is concerned. The aim of this chapter is to draw attention to the specific nature of women's religious expressions and to deepen our understanding in the social sciences of the religious universe of Muslim societies. Anthropological studies of gender relations have long emphasized the relative supremacy of men and the important role women play in the society. They have also focused on women's social organizations, their activities, and perspectives. Yet an important analytical problem remains concerning the articulation of worlds of men and women. Indeed, women's societies and activities tend to be considered illegitimate because of their status in society, and social scientists tend to perceive this status as the starting point of social analysis. The case of Ndiaye Mody would conform to this notion. Every attempt to refocus the angle of analysis that takes as a viewpoint the feminine experience in the world inevitably leads to projecting women as sub-products of society, as reinterpretations or negotiated forms of men's dominant culture. Could it be that this is a perversion or subversion of the established order? Is there a true dichotomy in ritual practices between women's space and the space of men?

Notes

- 1 CAP 21 means "Convergences autour du Président de la République à l'horizon 2021." This coalition of parties supports the actions of President Abdoulaye Wade and is led by Professor Iba Der Thiam.
- 2 Christian Coulon produced an interesting study of Sokhna Maguette Diop of the Murid brotherhood especially related to the study of religion.

- 3 Here we are referring to a number of studies undertaken by anthropologists including *La religion par les femmes*, edited by Nancy Auer Falk and Rita M. Gross, translated by J.-F. Rebeau. French edition, Geneva, 1993, 447p.
- 4 Interview with Ndiaye Mody Guirandu, "Femme et Chef religieux," in the Senegalese weekly *Nouvel Horizon*, n°.64, 2 May 1997.
- 5 Achille Mbembe, 1993, "La prolifération du divin en Afrique subsaharienne," in *Les politiques de Dieu*, edited by Gilles Képél, Paris: Seuil, pp.177–201.
- 6 Jacques Le Goff, *Le Purgatoire* (Paris, Gallimard: 1981).
- 7 cf. Michel Meslin, *Pour une science des religions*, Paris: Seuil (1973), p. 268.
- 8 A.A. Batran, "The Kunta, Sidi al Mukhtar al-Kunta, and the Office of Shaykh al-Tariqa'I Qadiriyya," *Studies in West African Islamic History*, p.114.
- 9 R.S.O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint. Ahmad Ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition* (London: Hurst and Company, 1990), p. 74.
- 10 Louis Brenner, *Sufism in Africa School of Oriental and African Studies* (University of London. Unpublished manuscript).
- 11 Ibn Khaldun, in his *Muqqadima*, introduces the idea that the human soul may be a subject.
- 12 Or the capacity to predict the future and provide counsel based on revelations in dreams.
- 13 Achille Mbembe, "La prolifération du divin," p. 186.
- 14 *Nouvel Horizon*, 2 May 1997.
- 15 Roman Loimeir, "The secular state and Islam in Senegal," in *Questioning the Secular State*, edited by David Westerlund. Uppsala, 1995, p. 183.
- 16 This happened on 19 November 1977.
- 17 *Jeune Afrique* n° 1930, 6–12 January 1998.

CHAPTER 24

Islam and Modernity

Carmen McCain

In this chapter, I will explore the notion of alternative modernities in Hausa society, not merely those that grew up in reaction to the modernities of the west, but those that have developed for centuries in parallel with those of the west. Tracing the history of western theories of modernity in his essay “Modernity: An Unfinished Project,” Jurgen Habermas notes that nineteenth-century “Romanticism produced a radicalized consciousness of modernity that detached itself from all previous historical connection and understood itself solely in abstract opposition to tradition and history as a whole” (1997:39). Matei Calinescu describes in *Five Faces of Modernity* how for the French poet Baudelaire, modernity was characterized by an immediacy and spontaneity as opposed “to a past hardened in frozen traditions” (1987:48). While these definitions of modernity as a break with tradition seem to be the ones most often invoked, these notions are particular to a specific esthetic moment in European history. Kwame Gyekye takes issue with a conception of modernity as a rupture with the past. He argues in *Tradition and Modernity* that “[t]he conception of modernity may give the impression that modernity represents a break with tradition and is thus irreconcilable with it; such an impression would clearly be false. For one thing, every society in the *modern* world has many traditional elements inherited and accepted from previous, that is ‘premodern’, generations” (1997:271). Contrary to discourse that posits “modernity and tradition” as Manichean opposites, tradition is not merely a passage of static customs from one generation to the next but is instead an active interaction between generations. “The forebears—the previous generations—do not ‘transmit’ their cultural creations as such; what they do, rather, is to place them at the disposal of subsequent generations of people. But the subsequent generations may . . . either accept, refine, and preserve them or spurn, depreciate and, then, abandon them” (1997:221).

Taking further Gyekye’s observations about tradition being actively questioned by each generation, I believe this active questioning indicates the constant tension between the “tradition” of an older generation and the “modernity” of the next—with

modernizing impulses often tied to encounters with the “Other.” These modernizing impulses, within what is now Hausaland, are related to the concept of religion, and manifest in cultural production. After teasing out the term modernity in a historical Hausa context and giving a brief history of Islam in what is now Northern Nigeria, I will focus specifically on the Islamic modernization implemented under Usman d’an Fodiyo in the early nineteenth century and the current tensions surrounding competing traditions of modernity that contemporary Hausa filmmakers illustrate in their films.

Scott Youngstedt (2007) provides a succinct and useful definition of modernity in relation to globalization in a Hausa context. Following Dilip Gaonkar, he identifies modernity as “the ways particular people around the world encounter, experience, and develop an ‘attitude of questioning’ contemporary globalization processes.” While this initially seems to limit modernity in other cultures to recent processes of globalization, Youngstedt argues that “[s]ince it is generally agreed that we have had an integrated global economy for five hundred years . . . , and that Hausa have been active players in it since its inception . . . , then ‘modernity’ in Niger and elsewhere is this old as well.” He goes on to invoke Gaonkar’s (2001:23) statement in *Alternative Modernities* that “modernity is not one but many; modernity is not new, but old and familiar; modernity is incomplete and necessarily so.”

The conception of modernity as multiple is also reflected in Arjun Appadurai’s (1996:2) acknowledgement of the “deep and multiple genealogies” of all “major social forces . . . that have frustrated the aspirations of modernizers in very different societies to synchronize their historical watches,” and Brian Larkin’s subsequent appropriation of Appadurai’s notions of “alternative modernities” to create the term “parallel modernities.” Formulated specifically to refer to his observations on the Hausa experience of Indian film, Larkin’s term “parallel modernities” refers “to the coexistence in space and time of multiple economic, religious and cultural flows that are so often subsumed within the term ‘modernity’” (2002:18). Larkin notes that the often automatic “binary distinction between oppression and resistance” associated with western colonialism risks viewing African societies only through a lens of their “response to western rule and its consequences.” This focus on colonialism places the “less than sixty years of British rule at the heart of the Hausa experience” rather than as the most recent incursion in a recorded “history of over a thousand years . . . with the resulting irony of reaffirming cultural imperialism at the same moment as critiquing it” (2002:19).

Youngstedt claims that Hausa modernity began with the advent of global exchange five hundred years ago (1995). However, one could find the beginnings of the globalization process (and therefore the process of modernity) much earlier, with the spread of Islam into Hausaland (and even earlier trade routes that connected this part of Africa to other parts of the world). In a 2000 BBC World Service World Lecture, Ali Mazrui notes that “[f]our forces have been major engines behind globalization across time. These have been religion, technology, economy and empire. These have not necessarily acted separately, but have often reinforced each other.” He places the globalization of Christianity in 313 C.E. “with the conversion of Emperor Constantine I” (subheading: “What is globalization?” par. 2).¹ The globalization of Islam, he notes “began not with converting a ready-made empire, but with building an empire almost from scratch. The Umayyads and Abbasides put together bits of other people’s empires (former Byzantine

Egypt and former Zoroastrian Persia, for example) and created a whole new civilization" (par. 3). The coming of Islam to Africa, then, incorporated new Muslims into a large international community of Islam.

Mervyn Hiskett's history *The Development of Islam in West Africa* (1984) paints the history of pre- and post-Islamic Sudan (the region of the Sahel from Senegal stretching across the continent to the coast of current day Sudan on the Red Sea) as full of vibrant civilizations, migrants, scholars, empires, pilgrims, trade routes, in contact with the Arab world and Europe, as well as societies further south in Africa. Hiskett notes that prior to Islam "[f]rom very early times there had been a trade-route linking Tripoli, in North Africa, with Lake Chad, via Zawila in the Fazzan and the Kawar oasis. Another route joined this north-south route and linked it with Egypt" (1984:59). These trade routes established vast trans-regional linkages that were later reinforced by a spread of a common religion. The people of what is now Northern Nigeria had contact with Islam very early on. From the eighth century C.E., Arab writers referred to the people who lived around Lake Chad, and according to legend, by the late eleventh century the Kanem empire was ruled by a dynasty of Muslims, who claimed to be descendents of a pre-Islamic Yemeni hero (1984:59). Hiskett speculates that the claims of an "aristocratic Islamic pedigree," which were common all over West Africa, supported "political ambitions" and prestige that differentiated them from local religions practiced by peasants (1984:60). The "modernizing" impulse to identify origins within the Arab world can also be seen in the Hausa myth of Bayajidda, in which a prince from Baghdad saves the town of Daura from the evil snake "Sarki" who lives in the town's only well. Prince Bayajidda subsequently marries the queen of Daura and gives birth to the sons who would found the seven Hausa city states (Yahaya, 1988). Read metaphorically, this legend establishes the claim of Islam, embodied in the prince of Baghdad, to free the people from oppressive rulers, called sarkis, and also establishes the Islamic patriarchy.

The "modernizing" impulses of the Muslim elite in the history of Northern Nigeria are, in fact, not all that different from the use of Christianity in Europe. Habermas notes that

[t]he word "modern" was first employed in the late fifth century in order to distinguish the present, now officially Christian, from the pagan and Roman past. With a different content in each case, the expression 'modernity' repeatedly articulates the consciousness of an era that refers back to the past of classical antiquity precisely in order to comprehend itself as the result of a transition from the old to the new (1997:30).

Claims to Christianity and Islam once they became associated with political power seem to have been used to legitimize claims of superiority over indigenous traditions, yet in fact, they layered on top of older traditional beliefs, combining old and new to become, in Gyekye's terms, a part of the tradition itself.

Mervyn Hiskett's interpretation of the factors that contributed to the Fulani jihad of the early nineteenth century are in keeping with an idea of modernity influenced by an association with a global community of Islam. The Fulani scholar Shehu Usman d'an Fodiyo, part of a scholarly family who had settled in the kingdom of Gobir earlier in the century, traveled about the countryside preaching to people harassed by the

raiding Gobir nobility (Hiskett, 1992:158). He preached against the “godless ways” of the Hausa rulers, and subsequently gathered a large following of disciples.

Hiskett infers several issues that set the stage for the jihad. First, he maintains that along with the Fulani tradition of Islamic scholarship came a “sentiment of Islamic universalism, a feeling that the whole Islamic world was one Another factor that contributed to this sense of Islamic universalism was Pilgrimage. It was on Pilgrimage that the Muslim saw Islam at its most impressive and felt most strongly his identification with the world-wide Muslim community.” Although Shehu Usman was never able to go on pilgrimage, he had relatives who had, and he also read classic Arab texts that described the experience (1992:159). In addition, Hiskett argues, the Fulani “links with Egypt and Mecca, put them in touch with the new movements that were sweeping the Islamic world of their day They were . . . well informed about the European intrusions into *Dar al-islam*, the ‘Abode . . . of Islam’, especially Muslim India” (1992:160). During Shehu Usman’s subsequent reign and in that of his son and successor Muhammed Bello, a series of practical reforms were put into effect to enforce adherence to *shari’a* law, in addition to a concerted effort to proselytize and educate the people over whom they now ruled (Boyd, 1989:65).

The Fulani challenge to the “corrupted” localized practice of Islam by returning to a “pure” internationalist-inspired Islam can be seen as the challenge of “modernity” against perceived outmoded “tradition.” However, rather than a “rupture” with the past, this break with the elite ruling class was seen as a reform—a return to the classicism of “original” Islam, with a Sufi focus on an inner personal spirituality. In their account of the life of Shehu’s daughter Nana Asma’u, Jean Boyd and Beverly Mack note that the Shehu modeled his jihad on the seventh century jihad of the Prophet Mohammad. The poetry Asma’u later wrote about her father and her brother Muhammed Bello deliberately reinforces these parallels, from her emphasis on the persecution that led to the Shehu’s *hijra* to her recording of miracles done by the Shehu and Muhammed Bello (1999, 16:63–75). The rhetoric of returning to an “original” Islam, the reliance on textual scholarship, and the inspiration of a universalist international Islam, as opposed to indigenous “*bori*, magic, the use of hallucinatory herbs, hypnotic drumming” (Boyd, 1989:44) is a forerunner to other later modern Islamic movements in postcolonial Nigeria, which I will discuss shortly.

What particularly sets apart the Fodiyo jihad from the Islam practiced by the Hausa elite is not only the Shehu’s literacy, simple lifestyle, and strict interpretation of *shari’a*, but also his focus on converting the peasants to Islam. Rather than maintaining a mixed Islam as the esoteric religion of the elite, the Fodiyo family focused on sharing religious knowledge.² Hiskett notes that the Shehu’s sermons resonated with the “oppressed, dissatisfied nomads and peasants to whom he was preaching,” who joined him to overthrow the corrupt Hausa dynasty (1992:163). Once in power, the Shehu focused on populist education and social change, arguably challenging tradition in favour of an Islamic “modernity.” Boyd and Mack (1989) relate how the Shehu “spoke in their own languages to Hausa and Fulani about the customs they had to drop if they wished in all sincerity to be proper Muslims. He told the Fulani that their *pulako*, or full-blooded macho behavior, was outdated, and that the *sharo*, the customary trial of pain endured by strong young men was unacceptable. The Shehu condemned all [such customs] in

like manner" (1989:44–5). Islam, therefore, was framed as a modernizing discourse, to establish knowledge and justice and to rid the people of "ignorant traditions."

At the same time, leaders in the movement like Nana Asma'u cleverly appropriated traditional symbols as Islamic symbols, therefore transforming the outer accoutrements of a vast spiritual system like *bori*, in which women had long held leadership positions, into those of Islamic education. Giving the leaders of the groups of female students large *malfa* hats which was "one of the marks of office used by the *Inna* of Gobir, the chief of women devotees of *bori* [a spirit possession cult that provided powerful roles for women]. Asma'u deliberately took up the symbol . . . From being symbolic of *bori*, it turned into an emblem of Islam" (1989:89). Despite the discourse of abandoning local practice for a classical Islam, this practice of continuing certain practices in a new context demonstrates Gyekye's notion of the continuation of tradition in modernity.

Less than a century after this Islamic modernizing jihad swept through Hausaland, colonialism officially arrived with the British invasion of Sokoto in 1903. The colonial period introduced a complex set of competing modernities. Although I argue that "globalization" started millennia before the twentieth century and follow Gyekye's arguments about the continuation of tradition in modernity, colonialism certainly did bring a new set of dynamics and an alternative western globalization with new technologies, resulting eventually in faster transportation and more immediate communication. Furthermore, much of the Islamic world, with which the Caliphate had contact, also became subject to European colonialism, from Senegal, to Egypt, to India, thus contributing similar experiences of European conquest to a common religious experience, as well as exacerbating previous tensions. The fault-line between the French colony of Niger and the English colony of Nigeria fell right across the middle of Hausaland complicating, as William Miles points out, already tense political relationships among the Hausa kingdoms and preempting any hope for future political unification (1994:70). The introduction of western modernity indicates a profound paradigm shift, on a scale much larger than that brought about by the Fulani jihad. Arjun Appadurai argues convincingly that although the idea of a single "modern moment—that . . . creates a dramatic and unprecedented break between past and present" is problematic, that "the world in which we now live—in which modernity is decisively at large, irregularly self-conscious, and unevenly experienced—surely does involve a general break with all sorts of pasts." Appadurai notes that his theory of modern rupture and the imagination is intrinsically tied to the immediacy of electronic media in its relationship to mass migration (1996:3).

The rise of Saudi Arabian Wahhabi Islam in Northern Nigeria during the 1960s (Umar, 2001:132) with its focus on *shari'a* law and its opposition to older forms of Sufi Islam are described by Ousmane Kane, William Miles, and Muhammad S. Umar, as evidence of an Islamic modernity—a cultural homogenization similar to that brought by Western globalization (Miles, 2003:63). Kane remarks that anti-imperialist and anti-Western rhetoric is often a key part of the new Islamism: "They condemn both neocolonialism and the Western economic and political domination of much of the third world." Kane notes that the 1979 Shi'a Islamic revolution in Iran pointed to an alternate space independent of both Western and Soviet imperialism (1997:16). Iran

sponsored Nigerian students to study in Iran as well as funding media to spread Iranian influence. Saudi Arabia attempted to counter the influence of Iran by investing its own attention on Nigeria. Kane points out that these connections with Saudi Arabia opened up economic opportunities, so that Saudi Arabian business provided an Islamic alternative to Western capitalism (1997:78–80).

The anti-westernism of many of these new Islamic movements is internationalist and strongly opposed to local Sufi forms of Islam. Umar describes how the reformers, generally educated in Islamic government schools, formed an association popularly known as Izala in 1977, which “prides itself for preaching ‘modern progressive ideas’ and attacking ‘superstitious customs and traditions’” (Umar, 2001:134–136). Genuflection to elders is seen as inappropriate (Kane, 1997:139). “Tradition” is spurned, and the “true” Islam sought in the words of the Qur’an and the hadith. The Izala are intent on reforming what they see as a corrupted tradition, in which the reigning Sufi order collaborated with British colonialism. Ironically, despite their fierce resistance to Sufism, Miles points out that “[e]ven if the specific practices the Fulanis attempted to banish were not the same ones targeted now, the spirit behind the shari’a campaign today, and the earlier jihad of dan Fodio is remarkably similar” (2003:66).

However, the “traditional” Sufi *ulama* (scholars) have also changed with the times. Umar notes that the *ulama* regularly discuss “secularity of the Nigerian state, gender equality, human rights, democracy, and rights of ethnic and religious minorities” using broadcast technology. Even before audio and video cassettes became popular, Umar explains that they have been engaging in these conversations on air through international media houses like the BBC, VOA, and Deutsche Welle (2001:131). Umar also notes that paradoxically more western educated Muslims are drawn to Islamic fundamentalism than are those who received either traditional or modern Islamic education (2001:143). These western educated Muslims were the ones behind the move to re-implement *shari’a* law” (2001:145). Umar posits that “[b]y embracing Islamic fundamentalism, western-educated Muslims equip themselves with the necessary Islamic capital to compete culturally, socially, politically, and economically against Muslim elite trained in modern and traditional Islamic schools” (2001:144).

A particular source of tension in contemporary Hausa society from the early 1990s has come following the rise of popular novels and video films alongside political agitation for shari’a law, and the competing claims of popular artists and their conservative critics to Islamic authenticity. The video films, which deal with the tensions of contemporary life and are influenced in structure and theme by Indian, Hong Kong and American films, are read as being a challenge to attempts to re-establish the rule of law modeled both on the historical governance of the Fulani jihadists and modern Islamic states like Saudi Arabia. When shari’a law was first instituted, the Kano State Government briefly outlawed the films before establishing the Kano State Censorship Board law in February 2001 (Ostien, 2007:219).

Most common criticisms of the films are that they bring alien influences to spoil society and the Islamic upbringing of children. Zulkifl A.G. Dakata in his article “Alienation of Culture: A Menace Posed by the Hausa Home Video” argues that, “It is hereby sad to note that instead of using our culture to promote and sustain our indigenous development, we take to copying and imitating Indians . . . No right thinking Hausa

Fulani parents would permit their daughter to go to parks or bushes to dance and sing with a boy . . ." (2007:251). Much of this anxiety about "modern" and "alien" influence seems layered onto longstanding anxieties about those elements of Hausa culture seen as oppositional to global Islam. The world of the bori cult, condemned by Usman d'an Fodiyo, and its associations with the disreputable lifestyle of "independent women" overlapped with commercial foreign cinema culture in Northern Nigeria from the 1950s to which, as Brian Larkin has noted, "only the marginal, the young, or the rebellious" were supposed to have been attracted (2008:136). Contemporary Hausa filmmakers seem to have inherited many of these ambiguous associations. Matthias Krings points out the "video film sets" and "recording studios" where "men and women meet, converse and interact with one another" play the same gendered spatial function as bori "compounds, dance grounds and ritual arenas." (2004:163). Thus, anxieties about "modern" alien non-Islamic influences are combined with deep-seated anxieties about the non-Islamic elements of Hausa culture long combated by those attempting to return to a "purer" form of Islam. But while this disreputable world could once be controlled spatially, the mass produced nature of the films invades the guarded private space of the home. As the third director general of the Kano State Censors Board, Abubakar Rabo Abdulkareem argued in a piece published on the censors board website: "In the past, you could physically prevent young boys and girls from going to watch a film at the cinema hall if you feared they would be exposed to immorality. With video technology the devil has been piped into the home and corruption is only a click away" (par. 3).

Abdalla Uba Adamu has noted that some filmmakers defend their aesthetic use of Indian-style dancing and singing or Western dress in their films by saying they are just reflecting "modern society" (2007:93). However, film makers also often try to situate themselves as respectable figures in Islamic discourse, by emphasizing their connection to global Islam. Just as Nana Asma'u used the structures of bori to create an Islamic education system, Muslim filmmakers claim they can use the structures of an alien technology to further Muslim goals. In a memo submitted by a group called "The Kannywood Foundation" to the Kano State government in 2007, filmmakers Ibrahim Mandawari and Khalid Musa outlined a plan for the "Islamization" of the Hausa film industry, saying that "As Moslems we have a social duty to our society in objectively reflecting the anomalies obtained and advising appropriately through film medium" (2007:12). This statement reflects the arguments of many of the filmmakers I have spoken to and interviewed from 2006 to 2011, who argue that films are a medium for preaching to society. Critics and filmmakers seem to have similar concerns about "the prevalence of social vices such as corruption, nepotism, tribalism, abuse of public office and position, drunkenness, cheating, fornication, armed robbery, gross violation of human rights among others" (Report of the Committee on the Implementation of Sharia Law in Kebbi State quoted in Ostien, 2007:3). However, while critics often accuse the filmmakers of contributing to those problems, filmmakers claim that by showing corruption and its effects on society they are actually teaching their audiences and reforming a tarnished tradition. As Matthias Krings has noted, the closing credits of many films list actors as "masu fad'akarwa" (preachers or sermonizers) (2008:49). In the metafiction film *Sansani 2* (2004) directed by Ali Nuhu, when a young man

becomes a successful actor in the film industry, his greedy indis disciplined half siblings from his mother's former co-wives violently object to his work as an actor, while his kind and respectable stepfather links his chosen career positively to religion by saying it is a job like "preaching."

Filmmakers also often use Arab symbols of universalized Islam as shorthand for good characters and caricatured symbols of the "modern" west or "traditional paganism" for the bad. Krings has described a series of conversion narratives made in 2003 that portray battles between righteous Muslims and "pagans" (2008). In the film *Judah* (2003), a "cultural epic" set during a mythic historical moment, for example, Muslims are differentiated from the pagans by their kindly civilized behavior and their Islamic attire. Men wear robes and Saudi-style kaffiyahs and women wear hijabs.³ The "pagans" on the other hand wear outlandish leaves on their heads, speak in gibberish, foam at the mouth, and shout about their desire to eat human flesh. The civilized "modern" Muslims are contrasted with a contemporary imagination of "primitive savages." These portrayals of the "modern" Muslim versus the backward pagan are continued in recent films like *Mela* (2010), which shows a "civilized" Muslim visitor combating brutish pagan bullies in a remote village. For films set in contemporary urban society, "modern" western-influenced characters take on negative associations given "pagans" in the epic films. In *Iqaamah* (2004), the "good" twin dons a checkered kaffiyah and is shown as constantly praying and playing verses sung from the Qur'an on his tape recorder, while the "bad" twin dons western thug-wear and blasts hip-hop. This film is quite similar to *Auduga* (2004) (discussed in detail by Abdalla Uba Adamu, 2009), in which a respectable and gentle Hausa man, shown wearing traditional Hausa dress, is confronted by his long lost twin from London, who dresses in baggy jeans, drinks, chases women, and ends up kidnapping his brother and assuming his identity.

However, while the films I've mentioned above reinforce the typed language of "Islam vs the west/pagan tradition," other films often subvert symbols of outward piety in ways that expose hypocrisies and question an unthinking acceptance of outward appearances. These films reflect the nuances, tensions, and contradictions of competing modernities, portraying characters who balance globalization from multiple sources and western education with their Muslim faith. Films such as *Sandar Kiwo* (2009) and *Jagora* (2009), invoke the spirit of Usman dan Fodiyo, in stories of how shari'a law provides justice to the poor and defenseless. In *Jagora*, a young woman is accused of murdering her employer. When her lawyer learns that she killed him in self-defense because the man was trying to rape her, he deconstructs the testimony of an imam that the late employer had been a good man because he had made donations to the mosque, exposing the structures that allowed the man to pretend righteousness. In *Sandar Kiwo*, despite the abuse and neglect of her husband's outwardly pious relatives who abscond with the inheritance, a young widow raises her late co-wife's orphaned child and sends her to school through cooking and selling snacks. The girl is eventually recognized as the top student in her class and puts to shame her hypocritical relatives. The film combines Islamic ideals with western education to show how the two can work together. Similarly, in the film *Albashi* (2005), western education has made possible the wife's powerful job as the director of a hospital. Although her husband uses patriarchal and "traditional" ideals to object to her work outside the home, he is shown as a scoundrel who lies, cheats, takes drugs, and cannot find a job. His successful wife on the other

hand uses her obviously superior practice of Islam to defend her position. The filmmakers undermine critics who would attack them for “corrupting ‘traditional’ society” by making recourse to the words of the Qur’an.

In a transnational film *Kano to Saudiyya* (2008), the late director Ziklifu Mohammad questions idealizations of the holy land and Arab culture as synonymous with Islam. When a young Hausa man, Isah, comes to Saudi Arabia expecting to make his fortune, he is shown no hospitality by the Arabic-speaking Saudis, and he ends up sleeping on the streets. It is finally a kind Hausa man who offers him accommodation and helps him find work. The film similarly contrasts the Isah’s faithful wife back in Kano with the calculating Hausa businesswoman Fatima who has settled in Saudi Arabia; Fatima promotes Isah in his workplace and agrees to marry him only after he divorces his virtuous wife back home. Fatima then puts him to work washing dishes and immediately goes into her bedroom with an Arab man dressed in long Saudi Arabian robes. Rather than providing a righteous alternate modernity to the west, the wealth and sophistication of a modern Saudi Arabia here are shown as alienating the man from the values of his good Muslim upbringing in Kano, in the same way London alienated the “bad” twin in *Auduga* from his Nigerian Muslim upbringing. After Isah falls in love with the successful Fatima, he is shown smoking and speaking rudely to his Hausa co-workers, even insulting the kind Hausa man who had initially hosted him. This portrayal of Saudi Arabia as a site of corruption for an initially innocent Hausa character kicks against conventions that portray Arab culture as representing universal Islam, making an argument that true Islam is in following the precepts of the religion, not in location or outward appearance.

These complex questions about how Islam is portrayed are not always welcome and, indeed, seem to be one of the root anxieties about the film industry. Abdalla Uba Adamu describes early conflicts when religious leaders were angered by film makers attempts to point out the disparity between outward appearance and inward piety. After the release of the film *Saliha?* (1999) in which a girl, assumed to be devout because of her constant use of the hijab, turns out to be sexually active before her marriage “a fatwa (Muslim clerical ruling) of death sentence was issued on the director and the producer of the film by a religious group in Kaduna, who demanded that the film should [be] withdrawn from the market and the film’s makers apologize . . . for what was seen as disrespect for Islam” (2007:81). Adamu points out that another film *Malam Karkata* (1999), which portrayed an Islamic teacher sexually abusing women, was so controversial that it was not even released on video for consumption. And while, according to Gausu Ahmad’s research, there are some ulama who agree that films “can be used for entertainment, for enlightenment and cultural promotion and preservation as well as religious propagation” (151), exactly how the films go about “enlightening” society is a major source of conflict.

It is in this moment of tension between the culture producers and the critics that we best see the negotiation process and multiple forms of modernity theorized earlier in this chapter. Both filmmakers and the current shari’a government invoke Usman dan Fodiyo and earlier historical moments in Islam to claim a morally superior stance and ally themselves with the common people. While politicians and religious leaders point to associations with the bori cult, prostitution, and the alien influence of foreign film when denouncing Hausa filmmakers, the filmmakers counter these critiques with

accusations about corrupt abuses of tradition and the hypocrisies of the elite, claiming that they are the true voice of the masses. Manifestations of modernity in these films, rather than showing a complete break with tradition, rather layer on top of the historical background I have discussed in this chapter, presenting the complex ways in which ordinary people negotiate global influences from multiple sources.

Notes

- 1 In *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Philip Jenkins describes how in the first two centuries the church spread further in Africa and Asia than it did in Europe (17–19).
- 2 Ironically, the realities of conquest meant that the conversion was in many ways necessary to maintain political control. Mohammed Bello was particularly worried about the “subversive” elements of the bori “cult” practiced by his captured concubines, and thus urged his sister to educate them in Islam (Boyd, 1989:42–4).
- 3 While both shari’a advocates and filmmakers use the hijab as a marker of Islamic authenticity and often anachronistically portray it as part of “traditional” Hausa Muslim attire, Hauwa Mahdi (2009) and others have pointed out that the hijab only became common in Nigeria after the 1970s and the rise of the Izala movement.

CHAPTER 25

Jihad

John H. Hanson

Introduction

Jihad is an evocative concept informed by Muslim readings of Islamic texts. The term literally means “striving,” “effort,” or “struggle,” and its Islamic associations range from non-violent actions to warfare. Influential Muslim legal scholars defined *jihad* as religiously sanctioned armed struggle during the first Islamic centuries, but other views, including understandings of *jihad* as spiritual effort, also circulate in the Muslim world. As with all religious concepts, *jihad* gained moral force as Muslims put specific ideas to work in particular contexts over the centuries. In western Africa, for example, some Muslims invoked *jihad* as armed struggle to address specific challenges during the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries; at the same time, understandings of *jihad* as spiritual effort remained salient and gained renewed currency with the rise of new Sufi orders beginning in the late nineteenth century. This essay discusses academic approaches to the study of Islam, examines references to *jihad* in early Islamic texts and subsequent Muslim writings, surveys Muslim interpretations of *jihad* in African history, and concludes with analysis of the invocation of *jihad* in West Africa during the past three hundred years.

Academic Approaches to the Study of Islam and Muslim Societies

One academic approach to the study of Islam stresses the analysis of texts based on a command of classical Arabic and other languages of Muslim literati. This approach shares the sources and occasionally the methods of Muslims who produced the texts, and it describes the unfolding of Islam as a religious tradition. Other approaches draw on diverse materials (including non-Muslim texts) and pose questions informed by literary analysis and/or social science theories. These works produce conclusions against

the grain of texts and reconstruct social and cultural transformations to which texts refer only obliquely. Diverse approaches to Islam have produced a range of perspectives on the ways Muslims acted on their beliefs at the inception of Islam and in subsequent periods when they involved themselves in religious, social and political affairs.

Some divide Africa at the Sahara, seeing the northern regions as part of the Middle East and viewing contexts south of the Sahara as separate and peripheral. As a result, academic research on Islam in sub-Saharan Africa got a late start, despite the fact that its Muslim scholars wrote texts and made numerous contributions to religious life. Recently researchers have adopted textual, literary, and social science approaches and analyzed the ways African Muslims, as Muslims elsewhere, drew on the concept of *jihad* to advocate both non-violent religious effort and armed struggle.

Jihad in Islam's Early Texts

Jihad and related words based on *j-h-d*, the Arabic root meaning to strive or exert oneself, acquire meanings from their use in Islamic texts. These terms appear more than thirty times in the Qur'an and are employed more frequently in other authoritative texts, such as the *ahadiths* or "reports" of the early Muslim community, which serve as Traditions for constructing legal recommendations. *Jihad* also is a topic in early exegesis of the Qur'an, biographies of the Prophet Muhammad, and accounts of Muslim military campaigns during the early Islamic centuries.¹ These texts employ *jihad* and derivative words in reference to religiously sanctioned armed struggle and non-violent effort.

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is a series of statements from God transmitted over several decades by the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad. Its memorized verses reportedly became a text when Muslims wrote it down after Muhammad's death. Several verses invoke *jihad* to urge Muslims to dispute their opponents, and others associate *jihad* with "fighting in the path of God." Some verses advocate conciliatory relations with unbelievers, such as verse 8:61, which recommends that Muslims should seek peace with their enemy if the latter is so inclined. Others allude to armed struggle as a defensive measure, such as 22:39 which condones fighting if Muslims are unjustly wronged by their enemies. Still others, the so-called "sword verses" (9:5 and 9:29), condone more expansive military efforts against opponents. Many verses serve as exhortations, such as verse 2:216, which concedes that fighting has been prescribed but some Muslims dislike it. Others provide exemptions from fighting in some cases. The Qur'an also alludes to heavenly rewards, such as verse 3:169, which reassures Muslims that God takes care of those killed fighting in the way of God.

Subsequent Islamic texts provide even more perspectives and recommendations regarding *jihad* as both armed struggle and non-violent effort. One authoritative *hadith* reports that the best *jihad* is confronting a tyrannical ruler with a just word.² Another refers to meritorious religious efforts of the hand, tongue, and heart.³ A widely cited *hadith* in later collections reports that the Prophet Muhammad told Muslims that, after they had fought a battle, they were returning from the lesser to the greater *jihad*, which, according to Muhammad, was the *jihad al-nafs* or "struggle against the soul."⁴ Much more common, however, are traditions referring to *jihad* as armed struggle. Many

provide specific details about its conduct and the rewards awaiting martyrs in Paradise. References to armed struggle as religious activity also appear in the early biographies of Muhammad and narratives of Muslim campaigns, which espoused spiritual preparation and fighting in the way of God as core Islamic values. The early texts stress *jihad* as armed struggle, but they also refer to non-violent effort.

Jihad as a Muslim Concept over the Centuries

Academic researchers initially focused on the texts of Muslim judicial scholars who wrote centuries after Muslim conquests had created an imperial domain.⁵ The early jurists defined *jihad* as religiously sanctioned warfare and set comprehensive terms for its appropriate fulfillment. Their conclusions depended upon the invocation of *naskh* ("abrogation") or the privileging of subsequent verses in the Qur'an when two or more appear to offer conflicting recommendations: these Muslim scholars elevated verses commanding retaliation against Islam's enemies over those counseling non-violent effort.⁶ This reading of the Qur'an presumes that Muhammad's peaceful advocacy gave way to fighting after the *hijra* or "emigration" of the Muslim community from Mecca to Medina in response to religious oppression. The jurists set out terms for the declaration of *jihad*, its leadership, the division of booty, and other issues based on their interpretation of the Qur'an and Traditions. They envisioned a *dar al-Islam* ("domain of Islam") led by a single political-religious leader, the Caliph, who had authority to wage *jihad* against unbelievers in the *dar al-harb* ("domain of warfare"). Minor differences in interpretation exist between "schools of law" associated with specific jurists. Legal recommendations, however, were opinions and not necessarily applied by Muslim leaders. These early jurists nonetheless consolidated the concept of *jihad* as religiously sanctioned warfare in Islamic discourse.

Other Muslims interpreted the meaning of military *jihad* over the centuries. The initial Muslim view may have so contrasted with previous Arab ideas about warfare that some may have questioned the concept: equivocal statements about fighting in the Qur'an and early Islamic texts suggest such contestations.⁷ Frontier Muslim fighters had their own views of *jihad*, too, and the definition of Muslim scholars reflected center-periphery politics as Caliphs based in Baghdad asserted control over Muslim borderland regions through these authoritative opinions.⁸ Even after jurists constructed their legal concept, Muslims articulated other views. Shi'i Muslims, for example, rejected the assertion that the Caliph alone had authority to authorize armed struggle.⁹ Others amplified the concept when they engaged Christian invaders during the era of the Crusades and again when they fought to establish the Ottoman state.

Muslims also recognized non-violent forms of *jihad*. Some recommended the merits of *jihad* of the hand, the tongue and the heart as efforts to support Islam without fighting. Others, influenced by Sufi mystical ideas, understood the "greater *jihad*" to refer to spiritual activities such as repeating litanies and other rituals meant to bring seekers closer to God.¹⁰ References to Sufism as *jihad al-nafs* appear in Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's influential twelfth-century writings and subsequent scholarly works. The

Sufi interpretive stream became widespread as it transformed itself from an elite phenomenon into a major religious movement in many regions of the Muslim world. Sufi meditations on the “greater *jihad*” did not necessarily imply rejection of military *jihad*, but even as they engaged in armed struggle, Sufi Muslims continued to understand their rituals as the “greater *jihad*.”

A growing reformist movement shaped Muslims views of *jihad* beginning three hundred years ago. Some Muslim scholars engaged afresh in interpreting the Qur'an and Traditions unconstrained by scholarly precedents. These scholars saw themselves as reformers and sought to revise established views on various topics, including *jihad*. European imperialism gave these reformers and other Muslims cause to invoke military *jihad* against imperial interventions in Asia and Africa.¹¹ But some Muslim scholars argued against armed struggle in recognition of European military superiority, and others drew on Muhammad's example of the *hijra* or “emigration” to call emigration from territories falling under European colonial rule.

Diverse voices contribute to recent Muslim discussions of the meaning of *jihad* for the contemporary world. A small but vocal group continues to call for armed struggle to confront what they see as corrupt Muslim rulers or to counter their sense of growing non-Muslim interventions in Muslim contexts.¹² Another group stresses that military *jihad* can only be defensive in nature and accepts that the current system of international law makes it irrelevant.¹³ Sufi interpretations of the “greater *jihad*” as spiritual effort remain influential, and new Muslim religious movements offer their own views on the meaning of *jihad*.¹⁴

Jihad and Africa

African understandings of *jihad* initially reflected historical patterns related to Islam's expansion on the continent.¹⁵ The conquests after Muhammad's death in 632 C.E. brought northern Africa under Muslim control through military campaigns represented as fighting in the way of God. From Egypt to Morocco, Muslim Arabs expanded westward as they defeated elites and ruled over Copts and Berbers. Mass conversions of local populations occurred several centuries later after widespread adoption of Arabic and other social changes, and the appeal of fighting in God's way remained powerful to new converts. Berber Muslims, for example, drew on Sunni, Shii'i, and Khariji views of armed struggle and fought wars which expanded Islam's frontiers into Iberia or challenged elites in northern Africa itself. Much later the notion of *jihad* as spiritual effort became a strong current in northern Africa when Sufi orders emerged as religious organizations in the region.

Muslim Arabs did not extend their conquests across the Sahara desert, and military *jihad* was not a dominant concern for Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa. There Islam expanded gradually as small numbers converted after contact with expatriate Muslim merchants: these converts subsequently proselytized Islam in local languages, and Islam's expansion was slow and uneven. Given Islam's status as a minority faith, *jihad* as armed struggle was not pressed, and understandings of spiritual effort, including

Sufi ideas, circulated throughout the region. When African rulers converted, the question of the state's status within *dar al-Islam* arose, with some Muslim elites representing their wars against non-Muslims as *jihad*. Overall, however, the dominant pattern in sub-Saharan Africa during the first Muslim millennium was acceptance of Islam's status as a minority faith and emphasis on non-violent effort to promote spiritual and social welfare.

Jihad as armed struggle did occur in selected sub-Saharan African contexts. In sixteenth-century northeastern Africa, the expansion of the Christian kingdom in the Ethiopian highlands was countered by a military *jihad* in which Somali Muslims swept into the highlands and won a series of victories before their leader died in battle. The Christian kingdom survived but it was weakened, and Islam gradually expanded in the highlands during the subsequent centuries. In western Africa, Muslims fought a series of military *jihads* beginning in the late seventeenth century. These wars expanded during the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth centuries, as will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

African Muslims responded to nineteenth-century European colonial assertions in a variety of ways, including armed resistance represented as *jihad*. In northern Africa and regions of western and eastern Africa, Europeans faced established Muslim leaders. Some reluctantly negotiated ways to preserve some of their power and autonomy under colonial rule, but others fought European advances. Occasionally there were dramatic Muslim victories, such as the defeat of the British general Charles Gordon in the upper Nile valley, but Muslim efforts ultimately failed to thwart European colonial expansion. Thereafter armed resistance took the form of guerrilla campaigns. For example, Muslims continued to attack colonial officials in Algeria for decades.¹⁶ Not all African Muslims engaged in armed resistance: some scholars ruled that European military superiority was such that it was acceptable to submit to colonial rule in order to maintain Islam in the region, and some Muslims agreed to serve as intermediaries in local administrations.¹⁷ The era of European intervention created fissures that endured in Muslim communities throughout the colonial period.¹⁸

Advocacy for military *jihad* has not been a major current in contemporary times. During the colonial era many African Muslims withdrew from politics to focus on religious reform or spiritual improvement. Sufi Muslims stressed the "greater *jihad*" in energized organizations as charismatic Sufi leaders encouraged Africans to convert and dramatically increased the Islamic ranks in both western and eastern Africa.¹⁹ In the post-colonial era the notion of spiritual *jihad* remains influential, but state collapse in Somalia and repressive regimes in Algeria and Egypt create conditions in which some Muslims call for armed struggle in the name of God. In Egypt in the 1960s, for example, Sayyid Qutb argued that the secular Muslim rulers of post-colonial Egypt were illegitimate and called upon a vanguard of pious Muslims to wage military *jihad* against the Egyptian state in order to establish a moral Muslim society. His ideas drew on his independent reading of the Qur'an and Traditions, undercutting the long Muslim scholarly tradition in order to assert his distinctive interpretation of the merits of violence in promoting Islam.²⁰ Qutb's ideas are quite influential beyond Egypt, but those pursuing armed struggle against the Egyptian state have not been able to win over most Egyptians to this view.

West African Examples

Jihad as spiritual effort is a major interpretive stream in West Africa, but the region experienced calls for armed struggle against corrupt elites beginning in the late seventeenth century. The first armed struggle occurred in the southern Sahara, today's Mauritania, where Nasir al-Din, a Muslim scholar of Berber heritage, led a revolt against local elites before dying in battle. Several decades later Fulbe Muslims successfully waged a military *jihad* in Bundu in the upper Senegal valley. Other Fulbe Muslims won campaigns in mid-eighteenth-century Futa Jalon (in the highlands of today's Guinea) and in late eighteenth-century Futa Toro (in the middle Senegal valley). By the nineteenth century Muslim wars extended eastward under the leadership of several Muslim scholars: Usman dan Fodio inspired a series of revolts in several Hausa states after 1804 and founded the Sokoto Caliphate; in 1818 Ahmad Lobbo led a successful *jihad* in Masina and founded the Hamdullahi Caliphate; and in the mid-nineteenth century Umar Tal conquered Tamba, Karta, and Segu and later defeated Hamdullahi. A series of armed struggles occurred in Senegambia again after the 1860s, and Samori Ture's wars in the southern savanna were defined as *jihad* from the late 1870s. These latter struggles included resistance to European expansion as a goal, but none were able to halt their colonial conquests.²¹

The evidence available to reconstruct the military *jihad* movements is uneven. The eighteenth-century *jihad* movements did not leave behind many contemporaneous sources, but several of the nineteenth-century movements produced voluminous materials in both Arabic and *ajami* (non-Arabic languages in Arabic script).²² Most documents justified the armed struggle and then reported on its successes; the perspectives of *jihad* opponents are not well represented.²³ Increased Muslim leisure time expanded Islamic education and encouraged writing as well as oral esthetic production. Post-*jihad* materials include hagiographic works as well as devotional poetry and other pedagogical materials, such as produced by Nana Asma'us, Usman's daughter.²⁴

The armed struggles defy generalization. Most movements before the late nineteenth century took the form of revolts against established political elites, but several were conquests, such as the wars led by Umar Tal, which David Robinson calls an "imperial *jihad*" because it was an invasion of the interior by Senegambian armies.²⁵ Some efforts failed militarily, including the first one led by Nasir al-Din, but many succeeded and established an era of warfare during which Muslims initially targeted centers of political power but eventually conducted campaigns along the borders of new Muslim states. These subsequent campaigns often took the form of raids, producing captives which contributed to the expansion of slavery in Muslim domains of western Africa.²⁶ Successful Muslim leaders did not have a single blueprint for statecraft, and the Muslim polities created in the wake of the military efforts were autonomous.²⁷ They did not necessarily accept common goals, and sometimes the *jihad* leaders came into conflict, most notably when Umar Tal invaded Masina and defeated the Hamdullahi regime. The late nineteenth-century movements also were diverse, but they shared the reframing of *jihad* as warfare against European expansion.

Leaders of *jihad* often came from Muslim families outside local power circles at the time of their call for armed struggle. This pattern reflected the historical dynamics of

Islam's gradual expansion in West Africa, which was in the hands of Muslim scholars maintaining Islamic traditions within their sphere and providing services outside as scribes, spiritual guides, and esoteric specialists producing amulets valued by non-Muslims and Muslims alike. Some Muslim families had integrated themselves into power hierarchies as advisors to political leaders. Most Muslim scholars were outside these circles and often lived at some distance from political centers, although they may have maintained some contacts. It was this group, removed from intimate political involvement, which led the armed struggles, often drawing support from rural populations.²⁸ The *jihad* leaders directed their most pointed criticisms at political elites and their Muslim advisors. However their religious and political agendas tended to be conservative: most did not advocate, for example, new relations for social subordinates but merely sought to protect Muslims from perceived abuses without altering social hierarchies.

Intellectual influences on the *jihad* leaders were multiple. Initial studies drew attention to connections across the Sahara, and others posited intellectual traditions within particular ethnic and social communities.²⁹ More recent emphasis is placed on a dynamic Muslim discourse with several interpretive streams and complex formulations by the *jihad* leaders.³⁰ One of the most enduring Muslim interpretive streams accepts religious diversity, tolerates engagements across religious traditions, and seeks to avoid confrontations to the point of explicitly rejecting *jihad* as armed struggle. Its major proponent was the West African *al-hajj* Salim Suware, a fifteenth-century scholar whose works are found in libraries across the region.³¹ Other streams existed, and *jihad* leaders tapped into one influenced by reformers such as Muhammad al-Maghili, a fifteenth-century Moroccan who exchanged correspondence with West Africa Muslims: al-Maghili refused coexistence, condemned *bida'* ("blameworthy innovation" in religious practice), and encouraged aggressive confrontation and armed struggle.³²

The vibrancy of Muslim exchanges is evident in the correspondence between the *jihad* leadership of the Sokoto Caliphate and Muhammad al-Kanimi, a Muslim scholar from neighboring Bornu.³³ After Bornu was attacked by *jihad* forces in 1808, al-Kanimi countered the Sokoto view that armed *jihad* was lawful if Muslim rulers and advisors tolerated *bida'*: he argued that Bornu's elite may have allowed innovation, but they did so unintentionally and thus were only sinners and not unbelievers who could be attacked. This argument was powerful because Usman had allowed that those who were not in power and practiced *bida'* were not lawful subjects of attack. The Sokoto elite shifted its complaints to condemn the Bornu elite's reported assistance to Sokoto's non-Muslim opponents. This correspondence, one of the few glimpses of contestation of the era, reveals the contours of Muslim debates that the *jihad* movements sparked.

There were other influences on the *jihad* leaders.³⁴ Sufism seems not to have been a significant factor in the earliest military *jihad* movements, but it began to have an influence in the nineteenth century.³⁵ Usman dan Fodio was a Qadiriyya Sufi, but he did not draw on the order to organize his movement, and only after its success did it become popular among the ruling elite in the Sokoto Caliphate.³⁶ Umar Tal recruited many of his followers through the Tijaniyya order, but his formulation of *jihad* hinged primarily on disappointment with the post-*jihad* social order in Futa Toro and Futa Jalon and the imagined threats of non-Muslim states of Karta and Segou, among other local factors. What emerges most clearly in the intellectual trajectories of these *jihad* leaders is that they were aware of Sufi ideas circulating in the Muslim world, as well as the views of

reformers, but they expended their own intellectual effort to address specific challenges in distinctive arguments for *jihad*.³⁷

Historians attempt to correlate the outbreak of Muslim armed struggle with socio-economic transformations in western Africa. Some historians argue that Nasir al-Din's *jihad* arose in opposition to raiding by Saharan groups and inspired Muslims in Bundu, Futa Jalon, and Futa Toro to establish Muslim states to prevent the faithful from being enslaved and sold into trans-Atlantic or trans-Saharan commercial networks.³⁸ Arabic documents are rare for this period, so the motives and objectives of the *jihad* leaders are difficult to reconstruct, but circumstantial evidence of increasing social insecurity is suggestive, as is the overall reduction in the numbers of Muslims flowing into trans-Atlantic commercial networks over time.³⁹ Social insecurity remained a concern for nineteenth-century *jihad* leaders, as the desire to protect Muslims from abuses was a pervasive argument. Whether the desire to enslave non-Muslims drove any of the movements is unanswerable given the existing materials. More likely as a factor, especially in coastal areas of Senegal, is the increasing wealth of Muslim farmers who sold their surplus grain in trans-Atlantic markets and could afford to purchase weapons and join armed struggles in the nineteenth century.⁴⁰

By the late nineteenth century, *jihad* became the call of Muslims resisting European encroachment. Muslim political elites initially engaged Europeans in negotiations, but as European territorial ambitions became apparent and outright invasions occurred, most Muslim leaders fought to defend against these incursions. The descendants of Umar Tal, for example, engaged in vigorous armed struggle against advancing French imperial forces in the interior. New *jihad* movements also arose to defend against imperial expansion closer to the coast, with numerous examples in Senegal and the Gambia. The late nineteenth century had its complexities. Successors to Umar Tal sent emissaries to recruit Muslims from the middle Senegal valley to join their armies in the interior. While French encroachment encouraged many to migrate from the lower Senegal valley, most Muslim migrants questioned the value of military campaigns, settled in Karta and did not join Umarian armies mustering in Segu.⁴¹ Contrasting visions between leaders and followers, often difficult to reconstruct for the military *jihad* movements, underscore the complex currents associated with the era.

Muslims revitalized non-violent interpretations of *jihad* and put them to work during the chaotic social transformations of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century West Africa. While some Muslims continued to wage guerilla campaigns or rebel well into the 1920s, most Muslims grudgingly opted not to fight against the colonial order militarily. Sufi leaders were in the forefront of Muslims establishing new organizations and communities focused on the "greater *jihad*" of spiritual development. Amadu Bamba promoted spiritual education and cash-cropping as several Wolof states collapsed during armed resistance and French military advance.⁴² His new movement, the Muridiyya, a branch of the Qadiriyya Sufi order, recruited Muslims and non-Muslims alike from the ranks of soldiers, farmers, former slaves, and others fleeing the fighting and subsequent French colonial consolidation in Senegal.⁴³ Another Sufi leader, Yacouba Sylla of the Tijaniyya order, articulated a radical message of social justice to servile groups in the upper Senegal valley. When Sylla's movement fell afoul of colonial officials and Muslim elites, he was imprisoned and released in Côte d'Ivoire, where his followers

joined him, renounced militancy, and became involved in spiritual activities and cash-cropping.⁴⁴ The spiritual approach of another Tijaniyya Sufi leader, Ibrahim Niass, was influential in towns and cities throughout West Africa.⁴⁵ Peaceful interpretations also circulated in other (non-Sufi) Muslim movements of the era.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Jihad remains an evocative concept for Muslims. Early Islamic texts included statements regarding armed struggle and non-violent effort. Ever since, Muslim scholars and other leaders have elaborated on the concept over the centuries. Muslims in Africa participated in these discussions, added their own views and will continue to interpret *jihad* based on the changing circumstances of their lives.

Notes

- 1 Michael Bonner, *Jihad in History: Doctrines and Practices* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
- 2 For this *hadith* see Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3ff.
- 3 For this *hadith* see Reuven Firestone, *Jihad: the Origins of Holy War in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 17.
- 4 For this *hadith* see David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 35ff.
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CHAPTER 26

Shari'a in Muslim Africa

David Cook

African Islam and the Shari'a

Shari'a as a concept and as a reality has deep roots within African Islam. Its present-day realities are as strong as any in the past, with several major centers of activism: radical Islamic regimes and movements mainly in Arabic-language African countries, and conservative, Sufi-based societies mainly in Muslim-majority West African countries and among Muslim minorities in East Africa. There is no doubt that since the mid-1990s shari'a and its implementation have been at the forefront of the demands of most African political Islamic parties and groups,¹ and polemic about shari'a constitutes a major theme in discourse between Muslims and non-Muslims (mainly Christians). This essay will explore the historical antecedents of the shari'a debate in Africa, and then concentrate on its practical application in the Sudan and in Nigeria, as well as examining the reaction to these experiments in shari'a on the part of African Muslim minorities and non-Muslims.

It is difficult to know how precisely to define the shari'a. In essence, as a scholar of Islam looks at it, shari'a is the sum total of the life-example (*sunna*) of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions, as narrated through the Tradition (*hadith*) literature, codified through the discussions of jurists (who themselves are organized into four legal rites: Maliki, Hanafi, Shafi'i, and Hanbali), and manifested from a practical point of view through the medium of the *fatwa* (legal opinion). Taken as a totality, then, the shari'a is a mass that no single human being could ever hope to master, and is in essence Islam as it is expressed through law, or idealized Islam. However, for our purposes, contemporary calls for implementation of shari'a present it not according to this scholarly definition but in terms of simply establishing or in some cases re-establishing Islamic norms in a given society. Inside the shari'a debate often little weight is placed upon the practicalities of implementing the law or what that would mean so much as emphasizing the fact of its reality as the basis for the society. This is especially true in the context of Africa.

African Islam, broadly speaking, has three major components: its Arabic-speaking North African core, and a pair of West African wings, and an East African wing. Other Muslim communities can be found throughout the continent, but these are usually the result of recent migrations or conversion. The North African core is quite homogenous, being almost entirely ethnically Arab (with the exception of the Berbers), and with the exception of the Coptic population of Egypt, completely Muslim, Sunni,² and for the most part Maliki in its legal rite (Egypt, however, is mostly Hanafi, and there are significant Shafi'i minorities as well). It is from this region that the rest of African Islam historically has drawn its intellectual and religious inspiration, as West African Muslims overwhelmingly have seen either Morocco or Egypt as the centers of Muslim education.

Today for North Africa shari'a is a major problem. Although most law systems among the Arabic-speaking countries (with the exception of Tunisia) allow for some place for shari'a, especially with regard to family and personal status laws, calls for full implementation of shari'a are usually associated with radical Islamic movements. Such movements have flourished in Algeria and Egypt during the past twenty years and have only been suppressed with some difficulties by the secular regimes. These regimes have responded to the radicals by allowing for some implementation of shari'a without (hopefully) compromising the secular foundations of their countries. Morocco and Tunisia also have had to deal with radical Islamic movements, but for differing reasons have made fewer concessions.³ In none of these states, however, is there the likelihood that shari'a will be fully implemented in the future.

West African Islam developed largely from trade and educational links with North Africa, and its historical roots are extremely deep. In general, Islamization was closely associated with Sufi holy men, who performed miracles and offered the hope of intercession with God in return for conversion. Education played a major role in West African conversion to Islam as well, as Muslims tended to establish Qur'anic schools as well as encourage Africans to study in Morocco or at the Egyptian university of al-Azhar. However, in spite of its breadth, West African Islam tended to be syncretistic. Many of the converts to Islam retained elements of their pre-Islamic beliefs and incorporated them into the Sufi ritual (as was so common in other regions of the world, such as India, Indonesia, and Central Asia).

For this reason there was a strong tension within West African Islam between those who espoused normative Islam (as it was understood in North Africa, and among Arabic-speakers) and those Africans who were syncretistic Sufis. Both were Sufis, but among the first group, exemplified by Shehu Usman Dan Fodio (d. 1817), the shari'a was the basis for their understanding of Islam.⁴ This fact continues to be reflected in present-day discussions about shari'a. Nigerian Muslims especially hark back to the Dan Fodio state conquered by the British in 1905 as the idealized shari'a state, but his example is revered by Muslims throughout the region.⁵

East African Islam is considerably different. With the exception of the Ethiopian lowlands around Harar pre-modern strong Muslim states were few, and none of them were driven by the need to implement shari'a. For the most part, the Muslim civilization of East Africa was either along the Nile River valley (a geographical extension of Egypt and closely tied to it religiously and culturally) or located along the Swahili coastline

and heavily influenced by the patterns of the Indian Ocean trade (in slaves, gold, and ivories). It was mainly with the coming of colonialism at the end of the nineteenth century that Islam began to spread into the lake region of the interior.⁶ Although the (mainly) British rulers did not interfere with the growth of Islam, they did not allow for any shari'a states to develop, and for the most part the elites of these countries, even when majority Muslim, were Christian after independence. In general, Islam in East Africa is Sufi and adheres to the Shafi'i legal rite, although today there are strong elements of radical Islam among the Muslim population in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania.

In the Sudan, however, a strong, albeit temporary, shari'a state did develop under the control of Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi (d. 1885), and his successor the Caliph Abdullah (d. 1898). This state was built upon the messianic aspirations of al-Mahdi, who gained popular support as a result of his claims and because of the antipathy of the Sudanese population for the European and Turkish rulers. Although this state enforced Islamic norms to some extent, its principle purpose was to expand and to oppose European colonialism.⁷ The Mahdist movement which continued under British rule (1898–1956) has since that time constituted one of the primary bulwarks against the full implementation of shari'a in the Sudan, especially under the rule of Sadiq al-Mahdi (1985–89), the great-grandson of the Mahdi.

Contemporary Applications of the Shari'a in the Sudan

Sudan presents an interesting case for implementation of the shari'a because of the obvious divisions of the country. The northern Nile River valley is inhabited mostly by arabicized African Muslims (other than the Nubians), who have taken on an Arab identity. The peripheries of the country, however, contain Muslims from a number of ethnic groups, most of whom have systematically resisted arabization (such as in Darfur and along the eastern coast and frontier with Ethiopia). But the most serious opposition to the implementation of shari'a has come from the south, where most of the population is either Christian or pagan (about 30% of the total).

Not surprisingly the south resisted an initial implementation of shari'a (albeit of a markedly laxer variety than is common today) during the immediate wake of independence. After some initial fighting a national compact was worked out where the south obtained a certain amount of autonomy. This compact, however, was violated during the final years of the Ja'far al-Numayri dictatorship (1969–85), and fighting began between the Muslim north and the Christian south. This fighting intensified when the regime of Umar al-Bashir took power in 1989, and identified itself completely with a radical Islamic ideology (represented by Hasan al-Turabi). Bashir declared a jihad to implement shari'a throughout the south, which after some initial successes gradually failed militarily. By 1999 however, Turabi's influence had clearly declined, and the Bashir regime was looking for ways to bring the war in the south to an end, which it did by another national compact signed at the beginning of 2005. Under this compact the south gains almost full autonomy and has the right to a plebiscite for possible independence in 2011.⁸

The major problems the Bashir regime, as the others before it, have had with the implementation of shari'a in the Sudan firstly that for the most part Sudanese Muslims are Sufis and do not subscribe to the ideology of radical Islam, and secondly that most of the African Muslims in the peripheral provinces and the Christians in the south see the shari'a as a tool for the arabization of the Sudan and the destruction of an African identity. Sufism in general in the Sudan, as with other parts of Africa, is largely syncretistic, and while Sufis (like other Muslims) theoretically can support the implementation of shari'a from a practical point of view the manner in which a radical Islamic regime has chosen to implement it invariably targets their interpretation of Islam. This is because popular Sufism contains a great number of practices that while well rooted in the culture have no basis in the legal structure of normative Islam. These practices include a number of festivals (such as the Prophet Muhammad's birthday),⁹ magical practices and popular rites (such as the Zar)¹⁰ that are seen by locals as being more important than the type of legal Islam endorsed in the shari'a.

The question of identity also is key when analyzing the reaction to the implementation of the shari'a during the 1990s. Promotion of the shari'a meant acceptance of Arabic language and culture at the expense of other indigenous languages and cultures. The Bashir regime and its arabizing supporters promoted aggressive classical and contemporary tracts and booklets praising the Arabs and Arabic.¹¹ While this type of propaganda could have been justified as part of national unity¹²—an elusive characteristic in a state as large and as diverse as the Sudan—substantial sections of the country decisively rejected both the arabization and the Islamization of the Bashir regime.

The Shari'a Debate in Nigeria

Shari'a in Nigeria is both similar and different to that in the Sudan. While the Sudan is a majority Muslim country with a strong non-Muslim minority, Nigeria is almost evenly divided between Muslims (in the north) and Christians (in the south). However, Muslims in the north are much more cohesive than the Christians because they have the shared historical memory of the shari'a state founded by Dan Fodio, which was ruled by his successors for almost 100 years after his death. The caliph in Sokoto continues this tradition and many of the prominent Muslim families and leaders in the north are either descended from Dan Fodio or his companions. But it should be noted that this shari'a state also is completely different from any other African shari'a movement in that it was Sufi in character. This fact means that radical Muslims in Nigeria have difficulties positioning themselves within the Islamic spectrum: because of their natural inclinations they are anti-Sufi, but because of the tremendous spiritual prestige of Dan Fodio and his close identification with the implementation of the shari'a this hostility towards Sufism is incomprehensible to the larger Muslim community.

It is impossible to discuss shari'a in Nigeria without starting with the commanding personality of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio. With his some 131 books and booklets on legal and broader Islamic subjects,¹³ not to speak of those of his relatives and intellectual associates, he has left a firm imprint upon Nigerian Islam that is both Arabic in

language (for the most part; some of his writings are in Hausa) and popular in nature, given the high level of Arabic comprehension among Nigerian Muslims. Dan Fodio launched his jihad against nominal Muslims who were basically syncretistic and not implementing the shari'a in its totality. He and his followers fought with this specifically as a goal, and did not actually fight any non-Muslims.¹⁴

With this heritage in mind it is easy to see why after independence in 1960 Nigerian northern Muslims emphasized repeatedly the need to implement shari'a in the new state. This emphasis was part of a political-religious movement spearheaded by Ahmadu Bello (d. 1966), a political leader who sought to unite the Muslims of northern Nigeria under his control, and Abubakr Gumi (d. 1992), a religious leader who was promoted by Bello, and founded the Yan Izala movement that pushed for the implementation of shari'a. Gumi was a very polemical character who was strong in his attacks upon Sufism, and supported financially by Saudi Arabia.¹⁵

During this period shari'a was applied, but it was usually confined to personal law between two Muslims. Several representative cases will be cited here. One took place on December 10, 1973, the case of *S.A. Shittu v. Ibrahim Biu* adjudicated at the High Court, North-Eastern State. The appellant was being sued for a total of *naira* 1,218.00, the amount he owed to the respondent on a contract of suretyship, where he undertook to be answerable to the respondent for the debt of one Rasaki. Judgment was given for the respondent against the appellant for the full amount claimed.¹⁶ It is interesting to note the methodology used in this case (as representative of others). English law and Islamic law are compared and the judge made the ruling that Islamic law applied as both of the parties were Muslims. Other than some issues of finding certain types of unimpeachable witnesses, the method was very strikingly similar to that of a western court.

Another case dating from December 11, 1985 involved a 19-year-old daughter of one of the respondents, who had given her the choice between three possible suitors. They had rejected the first out of hand, and she had accepted the second, and was betrothed to him, but remained in contact with the third. Ultimately, she fell in love with the third one, and asked her father to dissolve the betrothal, which he refused to do, and the man to whom she was betrothed formalized the marriage without her participation. She filed for dissolution of the marriage, which was granted to her, but her betrothed refused to accept it, and appealed a number of times. The father stated, "a father has the right to marry his virgin daughter without seeking her consent, irrespective of her age; but if he wishes he can consult her." The court upheld this view, and ruled that her dissolution of her marriage was illegal (it had been conducted in a secular court in any case).¹⁷ However, the case became even more complicated after that, because another shari'a court overturned this ruling, stating that the father had lost his right of compulsion (to marry his virgin daughter without her consent) when he had allowed her the choice between the original three suitors, and so the girl was then officially married to her third suitor. In contrast to the previous court case, this one contains a large number of references to Islamic law and precedent, and very little to English law.

For most of the period from independence in 1960 until 1999, Nigeria was under military rule, and the balance of the military rulers were Muslim. However, when

Nigeria transitioned into civilian rule (albeit under the former military ruler Olusegun Obasanjo) with a Christian president there was a sense of crisis among Nigerian Muslims. Christians had become extremely powerful in Nigeria, and while possibly not a majority of the population, certainly dominated it economically, educationally, and culturally. It is with this fact in mind that starting with the conservative state of Zamfara under the leadership of Governor Ahmad Sani in January 2000 that 12 of the Muslim-majority northern states of Nigeria adopted shari'a as the official law of the state. As Ruud Peters describes it, this adoption of shari'a was done so hastily that they were badly formulated and in some cases contained serious errors.¹⁸

Not surprisingly, the focus of the shari'a in northern Nigeria was *zina* (sexual relations outside of the boundaries of the shari'a) and offenses such as theft, consumption of alcohol, brigandage, and witchcraft.¹⁹ Although some of these offenses are in accord with at least the nominal penalties of the Nigerian federal law, some of them are not (most obviously consumption of alcohol and witchcraft), and in all cases the penalties for breaking the law are considerably harsher under the shari'a. Most probably the public enthusiasm for the initial implementation of shari'a resulted from the breakdown in public order that was associated with the fall of the military regime. By 2005 it was common to hear northerners say that living under the shari'a made the situation no different than it had been previously. Corruption and theft were just as bad, and frequently the prescribed penalties were not carried out.²⁰

Practically speaking, who is subject to the shari'a has continued to be a sore point which has never been resolved. Nominally non-Muslims (mainly Christians) are exempt from the provisions of the shari'a prohibiting the consumption and sale of alcohol. This fact has created a number of Christian-dominated shari'a-free zones (usually the "Sabon Garis" of northern cities, where Christians have tended to be the majority) on the one hand, and on the other the rise of shari'a-enforcing vigilante groups, the so-called Hisbah organizations.²¹ It is quite unclear what the nature of the authority of these organizations is over non-Muslims or Muslims who do not want to be subject to the shari'a.

There have been numerous high-profile cases associated with the implementation of shari'a in northern Nigeria. One interesting recent case involved the teacher and former preacher Muhammad Bello Abubakar from Niger state (age 84) who the British Broadcasting Corporation revealed to have 86 wives and 170 children in August 2008.²² Because the number of wives allowed for a man according to Qur'an 4:3 is four, after the story became national and international news Abubakar was ordered to divorce 82 of his wives, which he refused to do, or face punishment. It was not clear what the nature of the punishment for such an offense would be. Eventually Abubakar was released in November 2008 after having noted in court that Nigerian federal law did not prohibit his large number of marriages (there is no upper limit upon the number of wives a man can take according to Nigerian law). It is interesting that this particular case was stymied in two ways: first of all because the shari'a code lacked an obvious punishment (other than an order to divorce),²³ and second of all because Abubakar had recourse to the federal law.

The record of shari'a in northern Nigeria is a mixed one. While it is clear that shari'a has a strong element of public support among the Muslim population, that support

appears to be focused more towards the concept of shari'a (in the sense of upholding Islamic norms in society) rather than *necessarily* its reality. And the long-term viability of shari'a as an alternative form of law will inevitably come into conflict with the Nigerian federal law. In each case, thus far, however, when such a conflict has occurred, the supporters of shari'a have been forced to back down. For this reason, one can say that shari'a in northern Nigeria is the manifestation of public islamization—mostly covering those sectors of life that are personal in nature, with some spillover into the public domain. However, this spillover into the public domain is continually being negotiated and renegotiated. For this reason those who initially supported the implementation of shari'a as an all-embracing form of law have been disappointed.

African Muslim Reactions to Applications of the Shari'a

African Muslims have watched the application of the shari'a most closely, and in a number of cases have discussed the possible implementation of it within their countries—some of them reacting to the examples of the Sudan and Nigeria, while others have been involved in the building of national and trans-national Muslim identity. In general, the most interesting shari'a debates have taken place in those African countries which were British colonies (as were both the Sudan and Nigeria), as former French colonies have tended to be heavily influenced by French concepts of *laïcité* (an extreme secularism).

In east Africa, the shari'a debate has been intense in three countries, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, and has led to a civil war in another, Somalia. While Kenyan and Ugandan Muslims are clearly a small minority seeking to preserve themselves from very active Christian populations, Tanzania is more evenly split between Muslims and Christians. Tanzanian Muslims are closely concentrated along the coast and in Zanzibar (in which calls for the implementation of shari'a are seen by mainland Christians and Muslims as veiled calls for autonomy or even independence), and worrying about the possible threat to the territorial integrity of Tanzania the government has traditionally imposed a non-sectarian policy inimical to shari'a. As Christianity has grown stronger in Tanzania, however, the Muslim community, as in Kenya and Uganda,²⁴ has increasingly called for shari'a, presumably to protect its status.²⁵

Somalia represents a different case, where only with the collapse of the country has there been an opening where the Union of Islamic Courts (ruled briefly in 2006–7) was able to impose shari'a upon the southern section of the country.²⁶ The northern sections of the country (the so-called Somaliland and Puntland) have reacted to this by effectively seceding. The Union managed during its period in office, to increase its appeal by promoting a sense of security which it claimed was only possible under the shari'a. Although it is difficult to assess the relative popularity of this claim (as the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia brought this experiment in shari'a to a temporary close), one should note that this call for security is strikingly similar to calls in northern Nigeria that led to the adoption of shari'a. In both regions shari'a was seen as a panacea for the corruption or lack of security in the entire country (although the chaos of Somalia is much worse than that of northern Nigeria).

In none of the French-speaking countries of West Africa is there a significant section of the population openly pushing for the implementation of shari'a other than Mauretania, where it was implemented in 1980, considerably prior to other African Muslim countries.²⁷ However, one should note that this implementation does not seem to have been a formality, and in any case was more probably tied to Mauretania's connections to the Middle East rather than its connections to West Africa. For the time being, it seems that shari'a is not a popular cause in West African Islam other than in Nigeria, and in certain sections of Niger that are influenced by Nigerian Islam.

External Factors in the Shari'a Debate and Application

Being comprised of weak states and heavily influenced by the two major missionary religions of Islam and Christianity—both of which have powerful financial backers—it is not surprising that the shari'a debate cannot be discussed without its non-African component. From a Muslim point of view, the principal outside forces are Saudi Arabia (and its numerous political-religious and financial institutions) and Iran, and to some extent Pakistan (mainly in East Africa). As previously noted, one of the most powerful factors influencing the growth of radical Islam throughout Africa is the development of an educational axis with the Arabic-speaking Middle East, mainly Egypt or Saudi Arabia. Large numbers of African Muslim students receive scholarships to study in either country, and return to their homelands speaking Arabic, having acquired the spiritual prestige associated with knowing the language of the Qur'an. This spiritual prestige in many cases garners them leadership positions in their native countries and aids youth to challenge traditional Muslim leaders who may not know Arabic at all, or be unfamiliar with the broad range of Muslim legal materials.

This type of social transformation is backed up by either Saudi Arabian or Iranian money, which can catapult these comparatively younger Muslims into leadership positions and give them the international contacts their elders lack. The price for this is the transformation of the traditional African Islam into one that more closely conforms to Middle Eastern Muslim norms or in the case of some who receive money from Iran conversion from Sunnism to Shi'ism. Social transformation of this type can be seen throughout Muslim Africa and beyond, where well-funded organizations, beautiful new mosques and charismatic leaders attract the masses away from the traditional leadership.

Two other outside factors are aggressive Christian missionizing (usually either Pentecostal or Roman Catholic) and the appearance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Christian missionaries, usually now indigenous Africans, but occasionally from the United States and Europe, aggressively confront the assumptions that underlie the implementation of shari'a: that Christians (or at least non-Muslims) will accept some type of a second-class status from Muslims in return for a secure social structure. Although this was true in the past—and Muslims are quick to give examples taken from history where Christians did agree to second-class status—today it is difficult to believe that this would ever be the case again. The primary points upon which missionaries challenge the shari'a have to do with conversion of Muslims, the punishment of which

has traditionally been death, and the construction of churches, which is forbidden in most cases under shari'a codes. Because Muslims are usually unable to enforce the penalties that they see as right under secular law they often respond to these challenges by rioting. Certainly Nigeria has a long history of these types of riots.²⁸

While missionaries challenge the shari'a on issues that could be seen as peripheral NGOs challenge it at its very heart, usually accusing shari'a states of human rights violations. These human rights violations, for the most part, center around women's rights, especially criminal punishments stemming from the *hudud* (fornication, etc.) but also from laws concerning punishments for robbery (having a hand cut off)²⁹ and murder (beheading). These types of punishments are particularly problematic from a Muslim point of view because of the fact that the *hudud* are God's laws, and cannot be abrogated or set aside, especially at the request of non-Muslims. In general, NGOs have ignored religious persecution of non-Muslims under shari'a as highlighting these types of abuses has been usually the province of religious groups themselves.³⁰ Because of the close proximity between NGOs and the world media, cases that affront human rights violations receive wide coverage in the media, and can be the locus for mass protests against apparent injustice.

Probably the best known such case is that of Amina Lawal, who was sentenced in March 2002 in the state of Katsina (far north of Nigeria) to be stoned to death for adultery. This case attracted wide attention from human rights groups and feminist groups, who noted that while Lawal had borne a child (with whom she was usually pictured) the father was not subject to this punishment. With media attention focused upon the case, and mass petitions circulated to release Lawal, eventually the court overturned the conviction in 2003 and she was released. Other women similarly sentenced to be stoned for adultery have yet to have their sentences carried out, and politically it is probably impossible for them to be killed at the present time.

From the point of view of Muslims these interventions are unacceptable as non-Muslims do not have the right to modify the shari'a. For non-Muslims (Christians and NGOs) these cases highlight what they consider to be the barbaric nature of the shari'a, both because of the punishment and because it is inflicted solely upon the woman (no male to date has been charged with adultery in northern Nigeria). Muslims respond to this charge by pointing out the lack of evidence to convict any male (traditionally Qur'an 24:4 there must be four witnesses to the very act in order to convict), but that the evidence against Lawal is the fact that she bore a child out of wedlock. Muslims note that one of the primary reasons why the shari'a was instituted in the first place in northern Nigeria was to curb unlawful sexual activity. If such activity goes unpunished then there are no teeth to the law.

Although technically speaking shari'a law in Nigeria is solely leveled upon Muslims and any Christians who are in shari'a states are not subject to it, the fact is that shari'a states enforce certain norms upon activities such as the consumption of alcohol or fasting during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan that do have ramifications for non-Muslims. This fact presents problems for Nigeria as a whole, because the shari'a as it is conceived of by Muslims, and enforced by the various Sharia Boards, is a totalizing way of life. It is not designed to be confined to private space but to dominate the public sphere. When it is not possible to do this—because of legal difficulties with the Nigerian

federal law—then vigilante groups such as the Hisbah Guards fill in this gap,³¹ with the support of political leadership.³² In turn, Christians in shari'a states form vigilante groups to protect themselves, and in the process the rule of law is devalued and may be compromised completely.

It is unclear whether Nigeria can survive the implementation of shari'a. In general, both Muslims and Christians have avoided provoking the other in a way that would lead to civil war. But for an outside observer it seems difficult to imagine how two fundamentally different conceptions of law—Nigerian federal law and the shari'a—can coexist in the country, especially when both Muslims and Christians are roughly equal in numbers and can bring political pressure to bear upon the other.

Conclusions

Implementation of shari'a in Africa is seen by Muslims (broadly speaking) as a necessity. However, given that necessity, there are numerous different methods possible of shari'a implementation, ranging from the emphasis upon personal status and family law in the north, to the society within a society approach of the Nigerian Muslims, to the imposition of shari'a upon a reluctant population in the Sudan, to the (possible) imposition of the shari'a upon a completely Muslim society in Somalia (if the Union of the Islamic Courts succeeds in re-imposing their rule). In general, the problems with imposition of shari'a are severe when there is a large non-Muslim population that will be affected by it.

Shari'a as a form is highly attractive to African Muslims, if only because it represents the supreme value of the islamization of the society. Theoretically, it is difficult to find elements within African Islam that are opposed to the implementation of shari'a, again, if only because to do so in an ostentatious manner would be seen as anti-Muslim. However, from a practical point of view, it is clear that large sections of the diverse African Muslim community are either opposed to the implementation of the shari'a or else seek to radically modify it from a practical point of view. This latter tendency has especial resonance among French-speaking Muslims in West Africa, where there has been increasing discussion of the recent Moroccan divorce laws (of 2004). These laws radically overhaul the interpretation of the shari'a in a fundamental area: the rights of a woman in divorce. Prior to 2004 these laws significantly favored males with regard to the ability to gain a divorce and to benefit financially from it.³³ Because of the prestige of the Moroccan ruler (traditionally descended from the Prophet Muhammad) the new divorce laws are not seen as anti-Muslim even though they constitute a radical modification of the shari'a, and constitute a precedent for further such modifications among West African Muslims.

However, there is no such comparable modification process available in the English-speaking African Muslim world, in which the shari'a is seen as a take-it or leave-it issue. Muslims in Nigeria have not, on a practical level, modified the shari'a as a result of either internal or external pressures, merely left sections that are offensive (such as the stoning punishments) in abeyance. Most probably the difference is because of the identity-creation and maintenance aspect of the shari'a debate in these countries,

where many in the Muslim community feel that they are literally under attack from a burgeoning Christian population.

It seems that also from a practical point of view the shari'a debate lacks the critical mass of scholarship needed for full implementation. In Nigeria this is especially apparent, where shari'a implementation was a political decision taken hastily, rather than one where the legal issues were carefully thought out and formulated by competent scholars of Islam. It may take a number of years before the Muslim community in Africa can create that critical mass of expertise for proper implementation of shari'a.

Notes

- 1 The obvious exception being Senegal.
- 2 Although there is some conversion to Shi'ism in Nigeria and other places, see al-Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Murtaza, *al-Wala' al-haqiqi fi al-sha'b al-Ifriqi* (Beirut: Markaz Tiba'a li-l-Ahl al-Bayt, 1427/2006); and the popular account of Muhammad al-Tijani al-Samawi, *Then I was Guided* (Qumm: Ansariyan, 2007).
- 3 In the case of Tunisia because the authoritarian secular regime was toppled in popular revolt in 2010. In Morocco the King's authority is different because the king is considered a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, Libya has fallen to the radical Muslim opposition and its present orientation is unclear.
- 4 Mervyn Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of the Shehu Usuman Dan Fodio* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994, 2 edition), chapters 3, 8.
- 5 Ibid, pp. xii–xviii.
- 6 B.J. Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods in 19 Century Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), chapter 6.
- 7 Muhammad Sa'id al-Qaddal, *al-Imam al-Mahdi: Muhammad Ahmad b. `Abdallah 1844–1885* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1992), pp. 52f.
- 8 In January 2011, the Southern Sudan people voted to secede from Northern Sudan.
- 9 For polemics concerning this see Hamid Ahmad Ba Bakr, *al-Hujaj al-damigha wa-l-barahin al-sati'a fi jawaz al-ihthifal bi-l-mawlid al-nabawi al-sharif wa-yalihi Jawaz al-Ijtima' bi-l-rasul fi al-yaqza wa-l-akhdh minhu* (Khartoum: Dirasat Minhajiyya, n.d.); and *idem*, *Maflhum al-bida'a fi al-Islam wa-jawaz al-ihthifal bi-l-mawlid sayyid wuld `Adnan* (Khartoum: Dirasat Minhajiyya, n.d.).
- 10 For example, Janice Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).
- 11 e.g., Ibn Hajar al-Haythami's *Mablagh al-irab fi fakhr al-`Arab* (Ed. Yusri `Abd al-Ghani `Abdallah, Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-`Ilmiyya, 1990) sold popularly in Khartoum.
- 12 Interviewing among the Mujahidin in Juba in Feb. 2005 I found both Christians and pagans who fought together with Muslims for this specific goal.
- 13 See John Hunwick (ed.), *Arabic Literature of Africa: Volume II: The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), pp. 58–85.
- 14 See Abu Adam Abdallah al-Ilori, *al-Islam fi Nigeria wa-l-Shaykh `Uthman b. Fuda al-Fulani* (n.p., 1971), pp. 115–31; Ismail Balogun, *The Life and Works of `Uthman Dan Fodio* (Lagos: Islamic Publications Bureau, 1981), pp. 26f.
- 15 Ousmane Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria: A Study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), chapters 5,

- 6; Roman Loimeier, *Islamic Reform and Political Change in Northern Nigeria* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), chapters 3, 4 (note p. 179 where Gumi attacks the idea that Dan Fodio was a sufi).
- 16 Yahya Mahmood, *Sharia Law Reports of Nigeria* (9611989) (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1993), pp. 39–43.
 - 17 Mahmood, pp. 126–41.
 - 18 Ruud Peters, *Islamic Criminal Law in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2003), p. 15.
 - 19 Ibid, appendix 5, pp. 61f. listing the new elements to the law as a result of shari'a.
 - 20 Interviews in Kano, Zaria, and Sokoto (May 2005).
 - 21 Many examples of their activities are available on the internet, see e.g., <http://www.nasarawastate.org/newsday/news/nasara06/NewArticle45.html> (interview with Governor Ibrahim Shekaru of Kano state); <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6288480.stm> (attacks upon alleged prostitution in the Sabon Gari).
 - 22 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7547148.stm>.
 - 23 Some on the internet had proposed the death penalty, but this was later denied: http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&cid=1219339673209&pagename=Zone-English-News/NWELayout.
 - 24 In Uganda, see <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/459/654208>; in Kenya, see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7115387.stm> (denials that shari'a will be implemented with notes that many Kenyan Muslims would like to see it).
 - 25 <http://www.sharia-in-africa.net/pages/project/tanzania.php> (project of the University of Bayreuth on shari'a).
 - 26 <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4630&l=1>.
 - 27 <http://countrystudies.us/mauritania/57.htm>.
 - 28 Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1998); and a more biased account Jan Boer, *Nigeria's Decades of Blood: Studies in Christian and Muslim Relations* (Jos: Stream Christian Publishers, 2003).
 - 29 e.g., "Sharia in Nigeria," at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fbXvq_ZIbw.
 - 30 The rationale behind this apparent imbalance appears to be to insure that NGOs are seen as balanced and not advocates of Christianity as Muslims frequently accuse them of being.
 - 31 See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6288480.stm> for example.
 - 32 For example, Governor Ibrahim Shekaru of Kano stated that he would fight any one who opposed the Hisbah Guards (May 22, 2006): see note 21.
 - 33 Stephanie Willman Bordat and Saida Kouzzi, "The Challenge of Implementing Morocco's New Personal Status Law," at <http://www.globalrights.org/site/DocServer?docID=663>.

CHAPTER 27

Hinduism in South Africa

P. Pratap Kumar

In recent academic discussions there has been much critique of the apartheid era and how it affected South African population groups in many aspects of life. This essay, therefore, presupposes that the reader is aware of the system of apartheid in South Africa. However, to provide a context for the discussion at hand, a few general remarks might be in order. Prior to the 1994 democratic dispensation in South Africa the system of apartheid dealt with its population groups under a four tier system—the homelands for the Black African populations, and separate “Group Areas” for different race groups—Whites, Colored, and Indians. It was intended to prevent racial mixing on the one hand and to maintain White racial domination politically, economically, and culturally on the other. What is ironic about this system was that it enabled different race groups to maintain their respective cultural and religious traditions in a sheltered atmosphere without interaction with other race groups. Although different race groups could interact at the workplace, for all other aspects of life they were pretty much kept apart from close interaction by the devices of the system. White domination kept the other religious traditions from coming in contact with each other. It not only privileged Christianity in general, but the Afrikaans speaking Dutch Reformed Church was particularly promoted for its unequivocal support of the government, notwithstanding the dissent of a few among them, such as C.F. Beyers Naudé and others. In other words, many of the other mainline churches were seen with suspicion by the government. Not only did the system of apartheid clearly distinguish the churches of the White community, but the Colored churches and the Black churches were particularly discriminated despite their efforts to convert as many of the Colored and Black communities. Thus the Church was divided along color lines.

This privileging of a certain ethnic group and a certain denomination of the church during the apartheid era essentialized religion in that race and religion became two faces of the same phenomenon. In other words, Whites are presupposed as Christians of one denomination or another, Colored are either Christian or Muslim, Black Africans

are in majority Christian and in minority practitioners of African traditional rituals, and Indians are either Muslim or Hindu. Christianity did not seem to have made significant inroads into the Indian community unlike their Black counterparts during the apartheid government. But since 1994 there has been a visible explosion of conversion among the Indian community largely due to the proselytizing efforts by the Pentecostal and other charismatic churches. The Colored communities were drawn to Christianity as natural cohorts because they shared the White community's culture to a certain extent, and Blacks were converted for the most part during the colonial rule *en masse* as they were considered "uncivilized" and converting them meant bringing civilization to them.¹ The Indian community was largely untouched by the proselytizing efforts mainly due to the closed quarters within which the Indian community was forced to live during the apartheid rule. This broad overview of the apartheid era should give the reader some insight into how central the relationship between religion and politics was. With this general background, let me outline the Hindu practice in South Africa.

According to the 2001 census report (*Source: Statistics South Africa, Census 2001*), of the 44.8 million total populations, about 1.1 million are Indians/Asians. The bulk of them live in KwaZulu Natal province (798,000) and another 218,000 live in Gauteng province. The remainder are distributed among the rest of the provinces with Western Cape accounting for about 45,000. Of the total Indian/Asian populations, in excess of 1 million (93.8%) are registered as English language speakers at home. This makes sense as 97.3% (more than 1 million) of the South African Indian/Asian populations are born in South Africa and go back more than five generations. Of the total Indian/Asian populations, about 13.7% are in the age group of 50–74 years and 85.2% are in the age group of 5–49 years. In other words, not only have the majority Indian/Asian populations become alienated from their mother language and culture by switching to the English language, but also they are left without cultural education from their elders as there are fewer elderly left in the community. This scenario has a serious impact on the religious affiliations of Indian/Asian populations. But let's look at the general scenario of religious affiliation in South Africa. Of the total population of South Africa about 77.3% are registered as Christians of one denomination or another, and, with the exception of KwaZulu Natal where there were about 0.1% who were registered as followers of African Traditional Beliefs, the national figures for African Traditional Beliefs is almost nil (0%). In other words, the bulk of the Black African populations are registered as Christian (about 80%) with about 32% belonging to either the African Independent or Zionist Churches.² It becomes clear that the spread of Christianity has been vast with its inroads into South Africa from colonial times to the present impacted by the Pentecostal movement. In this light it is interesting to note that in the mid-nineteenth century the Christians among Indian/Asian populations were less than 5%, in the 2001 census almost 25% of Indian/Asian populations were registered as Christians. Between 1996 and 2001 alone there was an increase of 6% in favor of Christianity. Correspondingly in 1996 there were about 50% of Indians/Asians registered as Hindus, and in the 2001 census about 47% registered as Hindus (about 3% decline). During the same period, Islam gained in excess of 1% (23% in 1996 and 24.6% in 2001). The marked increase in proselytization in post-apartheid South Africa is

obviously due to the contact of religious communities with other traditions coupled with many other socio-economic factors.

Not only have a significant number of Hindus become converts to either Christianity or Islam in the last two decades, but the Hindu community itself is much diversified with the arrival of many neo-Hindu organizations to South Africa. I shall provide some insight into the diverse Hindu traditions that exist today in South Africa. First, some general account of how Hindus came to be in South Africa is useful. With the end of slavery in the mid-nineteenth century in most colonies, there was need to introduce new systems of labor to replace slave labor. By the early nineteenth century the indenture system was introduced in the West Indian colonies and also in Mauritius. The success of the experiment of bringing Indians under the indenture system of labor to Mauritius attracted the farmers in the Natal colony to request Indian labor from the Crown. The efforts to bring Indian indentured laborers was intensified in the 1850s and culminated in the arrival of the first group of Indians arriving in Natal in 1860. They were brought from both North India and South India with diverse cultural backgrounds. By 1911, when immigration was finally ended, more than 150,000 Indians, the majority of whom were Hindus, came to settle in South Africa. There were about 15% to 20 % Muslims and a small percentage of (about 5%) Christians. Not all of them came as indentured laborers; some came as merchants. Some of the Gujarati merchants were already active in East Africa, and many of them were attracted to come to South Africa with a significant numbers coming from India itself. Among the Gujarati free Indians, M.K. Gandhi was perhaps the most important figure because of his political activism which he began in South Africa and later returned to India to lead the freedom movement in India under the auspices of the Indian National Congress. Gandhi was a proud Hindu who engaged many of his Christian missionary colleagues on Hinduism and Christianity.

The Hindus in South Africa may be classified under different linguistic subgroups. Initially there might have been many different Indian linguistic groups because Indians arrived both from the north and from the south of India. Those who came from North India became homogenized as a Hindi-speaking cultural group whereas those who came from the south became homogenized as either Tamil- or Telugu-speaking groups. The Gujarati merchants, though, came from North India and maintained their distinctive linguistic and cultural identity within the Hindu society in South Africa. In the initial records of the ships that brought Indians to South Africa, we do not find a great deal of information on the various social backgrounds of the Indians, such as caste, language, and so on, except that they all were registered as Gentoos (a term corrupted from the word "gentiles"). Later ships that came after the 1870s give us some insight into the caste backgrounds of Hindus. However, by the second generation, the clear-cut caste distinctions did not exist in South Africa for a number of reasons: a) it was difficult to maintain caste status in the absence of the appropriate caste structures and traditional ritual authorities to regulate caste boundaries; b) most indentured laborers were dispatched upon arrival to various farms regardless of their social and linguistic backgrounds and as such they were forced to mix and mingle with other groups across caste boundaries. And this meant most of them marrying across caste boundaries. However, marriages seem to have occurred for the most part across caste but within linguistic

boundaries. In other words, the Hindi-speaking Hindus married within that linguistic social groups, and Tamils and Telugus married within their respective groups, although the social separation between these two South Indian linguistic groups is more porous as they had many religious and cultural common factors, and they integrated socially with each other by assimilating each other's rituals and ceremonies. For example, although typically the festival called Paratassi is a Tamil Hindu practice, the Telugus freely assimilated it due to intermarriages and close community interactions between them. One of the most significant effects of the social homogenization between different groups of Hindus in South Africa during the last 150 years is that many caste practices such as exchange of dowry (bride money paid to the bridegroom's family) have totally disappeared whereas in India it seems to have become more serious. The Gujarati-speaking Hindus however maintained caste up to now in terms of marriage alliances as they continued to remain a more homogenous community among the various Indian groups in South Africa.

The impact of this social transformation on Hindu society in South Africa is significant in that many Hindu rituals and ceremonies are in many ways distinct to South Africa. Most Hindus who came to South Africa in the mid-nineteenth century belonged to rural backgrounds and therefore brought with them the religious practices that were more common in rural India. Additionally, the majority of them came from a non-Brahmin or non-priestly background and did not share the Hinduism that was informed by Brahmanical culture. The Brahmanical culture in India is informed largely by the Sanskrit ritual texts and required a certain level of Sanskrit learning. But the rural Hindus, although they were indirectly influenced by the dominant elite culture of the Brahmins, seem to have retained the dominant elements of folk and popular beliefs practiced on the basis of oral narratives. Both the Hindi-speaking Hindus and the Tamil- and Telugu-speaking Hindus brought with them their respective folk beliefs that centered on the worship of the feminine principle as the Mother Goddess. The Gujarati-speakers followed the Brahmanical culture and practiced rituals that were performed by Brahmin priests. The priesthood in most of the temples built by the early and later indentured Indian families did not make use of Brahmin priests until recent times when some of the temples began to import Brahmin priests from Sri Lanka.³ The priesthood in most temples built by indentured Indians was open to any male who demonstrated some cultural knowledge and became a community elder. In some temples of the Mother Goddess, occasionally priesthood was open to female persons. The indentured Hindus in South Africa for the most part practiced village-based Hinduism by building small shrines and temples. For all practical purposes, the temple building functioned not only as a religious place but also as a place where they conducted most of their community activities such as meeting in the evening to discuss their social problems and economic challenges, for communal meetings, and for conducting language and culture classes for their children. They were more multipurpose centers than mere religious centers.

It is noteworthy that most of the early temples were built by the South Indian communities and later the North Indian temples began to emerge from around 1870 onwards. Thus, one could speak of two types of temple architectures—the South Indian temple architecture invariably included a shrine, tower, and a flag-post and are more ornate with the depiction of the images of gods and goddesses on the tower of the

temple, whereas the North Indian temples followed what is described as urban style (*Nagara* style) with fairly simple architecture and no ornate deities on the tower of the temple. Despite some unique attributes of the two traditions, the two communities participated freely in each other's festivals and ceremonies as Hindus.

Against this background of Hindus in South Africa, let us outline some of the core features of South African Hinduism. The practice of Hinduism in the early period (mid-nineteenth century to the late nineteenth century) primarily included simple rituals that the initial indentured workers were familiar with. Gradually some visiting religious specialists and leaders introduced not only literate versions of Hinduism, by emphasizing philosophical Hinduism rather than ritualistic Hinduism, but also introduced reform Hinduism. As late-nineteenth-century India witnessed attempts by many Hindu intellectuals to reform Hinduism from within due to the influence of Islam and Christianity, many of the reformers sent their versions of Hinduism to the various parts of the world where Hindus settled. This trend brought the Arya Samaj leaders to South Africa. The Arya Samaj was established by Swami Dayananda Saraswati who wanted to reform Hinduism from within in reaction to the missionary influence of Christianity.

The arrival of the Arya Samaj leaders since 1905 is of great significance to the history of Hinduism in South Africa. The Arya Samaj leaders introduced a form of Hinduism that they felt was more true to the original Vedic philosophy. They denounced the temple rituals and beliefs that they felt were based on mere superstitions and have no validation from the Vedic texts. In India, this gave rise to a reactionary movement known as Santana Dharma movement. They emphasized the rituals performed in the temples by temple priests. This division of Arya Samaj and the Santana tradition was introduced in South Africa among Hindus. However, it is important to note that this division primarily applies to the North Indian Hindus in South Africa and the Tamil and Telugu Hindus were unaffected by this division. In this context, it is also necessary to clarify that the Tamil community uses the word "Tamil" to refer to religion rather than language, and this has to do with their attempt to distinguish their form of Hinduism from that of the North Indians. Likewise, a Hindi-speaker in South Africa, if asked what religion he or she follows could say, "I am Hindi" or "I am Sanatanist." In other words the distinction between religion and language seems to have become blurred. For example, the Andhra Mahasabha is not necessarily a linguistic organization but a Hindu organization and Christians of Telugu background do not belong to that organization.

The majority of Hindus in South Africa, be they North Indian or South Indian, practice temple based rituals. Shiva worship and Mother Goddess worship are more common among South Indians, and the North Indians are by and large Rama worshippers. The Gujarati community generally practices Vishnu worship with Krishna as the central figure. A small section of them consider themselves as Shiva or Shakti worshippers. However, after more than five generations of settlement in South Africa, the Hindu practices are far more fluidly shared by all South African Hindus, especially when it comes to some of the more popular or commonly practiced rituals and festivals such as the Kavadi rituals and the festival of Diwali. Although Kavadi is more a Tamil ritual and Diwali is more popular among North Indians, the two are shared by Hindus of all linguistic backgrounds. Among the more commonly observed rituals and festivals, the following are worth noting.

Kavadi

Kavadi, as mentioned above, is typically a Tamil ritual performed to this day in Tamilnadu, India. In South Africa it has become very popular, and even after many generations, the Hindus in South Africa diligently observe it. The word “Kavadi” literally refers to an instrument used to carry water in rural India—with two pots hung on the two ends of a long stick and is carried by men on their shoulders. The festival of Kavadi is associated with the worship of Muruga, a Tamil deity, which is the local name of one of Shiva’s sons. Muruga worship is more popular in Tamil-speaking regions of South India and Sri Lanka. The believers take a vow in circumstances of dire need to carry Kavadi if their need is met or most of the times to appease Muruga hoping that through his power, their need will be met, be that financial, health, physical, or psychological. Most indentured workers derived immense spiritual strength by observing rituals such as these in trying times of their life in South Africa, and their successors to this day believe in the miraculous powers of Muruga. The festival of Kavadi takes place in the month of January of each year and is generally a very elaborate one taking place over a ten-day period. Believers go to great lengths to demonstrate their faith in Muruga by piercing their body with needles and pulling carts with hooks on their body and so on.

Firewalking

Firewalking is a ritual associated with the worship of the goddess Draupadi. In the classical Hindu tradition, Draupadi is the heroine in the epic story of Mahabharata. But in the folklore of Tamil regions and in many parts of South India, she is believed to be the goddess Kali incarnated as Draupadi. The Tamil devotees particularly are very ardent believers in the power of the goddess. Similar to the Kavadi idea, the believers take vows and observe the ritual. It takes place over a period of eighteen days and on the last day on the temple precincts, a large fire pit is established and the devotees walk on the fire pit to demonstrate their faith in the deity. Many of them enter into trance and become possessed by the goddess. It is common for other believers to prostrate before the devotee who is possessed by the goddess as the devotee becomes the medium for the goddess to interact with the other devotees. This festival usually occurs on the Easter weekend in South Africa and large numbers of Hindus from all over South Africa come to the Draupadi temples in Durban as a pilgrimage. Piercing their body with needles and hooks is also common at this festival.

Mariamman Prayer

Mariamman prayer is also known in South Africa as Porridge Prayer as Tamil Hindus make a special sour porridge during this ritual and offer it to the goddess Mariamman. Believers with physical and mental and other health challenges take a vow to worship at the Mariamman temple annually and others do it as part of their annual worship of the goddess. Mariamman temple located in Isipingo, a suburb on the south of Durban, is a very famous temple which draws thousands of devotees over a three-day festival

celebration. Devotees offer both vegetarian and non-vegetarian offerings and cook food and offer it to the devotees who are present at the temple. Particularly the devotees who take vows undertake to offer cooked food to the devotees who are present. Traditionally in rural India, Mariamman and other village goddesses are associated with epidemic diseases such as smallpox. It is believed that the goddess can inflict death, disease, and famine if she is not appeased year after year. The Tamils and Telugus who largely came from the rural south observe this festival to this day in South Africa with the same fervor as their predecessors did many decades ago.

Diwali

Perhaps the most universally celebrated festival by all Hindus in South Africa along with their counterparts in India and elsewhere in the diaspora is the festival of Diwali or Deepavali as is common in the south. Depending on which region one comes from, Diwali can be a festival signifying either Rama or Krishna. For the North Indian Hindus it is Rama who is celebrated during this festival. His victory over the demon Ravana and his eventual return from exile to his kingdom is celebrated by devotees by decorating their homes with rows of lamps and fireworks. For the South Indian Hindus it is Krishna's victory over the demon Narakasura that is celebrated by them. However, the festival takes the same routine of decorating homes with rows of lamps and making sweetmeats and inviting families and friends for parties. In Durban the festival has become a major attraction as it is usually organized on the beachfront with a lot of fanfare and with the local city fully supporting the events associated with it as part of their tourism program.

Festival of Chariots

One of the more popular Hindu religious movements in South Africa is certainly the International Society for Krishna Consciousness/ISKCON, popularly known as the Hare Krishna Movement. They have been in South Africa since the early 1980s when the founder of the ISKCON movement visited Durban and other cities in South Africa and established a branch in Durban. In the mid 1980s a very attractive temple was built by the Hare Krishnas in the Indian suburb/township of Durban known as Chatsworth. Ever since, the movement grew in numbers by enlisting not only many Indian communities but also local African populations and a few Whites. Through their "food for life" program they continually make visits to African townships and feed African children in their schools and this enabled them to make contacts with the African communities and gradually attract them to become followers of the ISKCON movement.

ISKCON is a worldwide organization which traces its origins to the eastern state of Bengal in India where the Hindu religious movement around the worship of Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, grew in the sixteenth century under the leadership of the founder Lord Chaitanya. It is also known as Gaudiya Vaishnavism. It believes in the supremacy of Krishna as the main deity within the Hindu tradition. In the

mid-twentieth century Swami Srila Prabhupada, one of the monks of the Gaudiya Vaishnavism, went to the west to spread what he called Krishna Consciousness and established the movement called the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. It became very popular in the 1960s and 70s in the USA, Britain and other western countries. In South Africa, to sustain their popularity, they annually host a festival known as Festival of Chariots. The images of Krishna, the founder Swami Prabhupada and other Hare Krishna leaders are paraded throughout the center of the city of Durban culminating in a three-day event of festivities, rituals, songs, dances, food, and religious messages. It certainly has become a landmark event in the cultural calendar of Durban. The festival takes place during the weekend of Easter which brings hundreds of devotees and tourists alike.

Neo-Hindu Movements

We have already touched on the Arya Samaj and its influence in the Hindu society. Since the freedom of religion enshrined in the new democratic constitution of South Africa in 1994 many new religious organizations from around the world made their impact on South African society. Among the Hindu organizations, Satya Sai movement is perhaps the fastest growing with more than fifty branches throughout South Africa. Satya Sai Baba⁴ was a holy figure who rose to prominence in India in the early 1970s through the popularity of the miracles that he is said to have performed for his devout followers. Most of his followers attest to have been recipients of some miraculous intervention from him in times of crises providing healing or other forms of help. It is essentially a lay organization without priesthood, and worship is mainly led by senior leaders of the organization and involves mostly singing of *bhajans*/songs and also sacred Mantras from Hindu scriptures.

The other significant neo-Hindu movements are the Ramakrishna Mission and the Divine Life Society. Both have originated from India. The Ramakrishna Mission was established by Swami Vivekananda in order to spread the message of the founder Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa in West Bengal, India. Swami Vivekananda, his disciple, made a significant impression on the west when he participated in the first Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1893. Ever since, the Ramakrishna Mission grew in the west drawing a significant number of followers from the west. The South African outfit was established by a South African who went to India in the 1940s in search of spiritual knowledge and was later initiated by one of the monks from the order of the Ramakrishna Mission in India. He was given the name Swami Nischalananda by his Guru. However, due to the South African devotee not having official sanction from the main organization in India to establish a branch in South Africa, he established an organization that mainly drew from the Ramakrishna Mission's teachings of Hinduism. So, he called it the Ramakrishna Centre in order to maintain its local identity. After the death of the founder of the Ramakrishna Center others followed him, and recently through the efforts of the new leadership, the Ramakrishna Centre eventually received the official blessing from its main organization in India. It is therefore now conferred the status of being a branch of the worldwide organization, the

Ramakrishna Mission. It continues to be known as the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa and is headed by Swami Vimokshananda who is appointed by the mother body in India. It meant that the spiritual head of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa is now appointed by its Indian Mission.

The Divine Life Society was also established about the same time as the Ramakrishna Centre and also under similar circumstances. One of the South African Indians, known as V. Srinivasen, went to India in search of spiritual knowledge and was attracted by the teachings of the Divine Life Society of India, established by Swami Sivananda. His Vedanta teachings became popular among many Hindu middle class. The South African branch of the Divine Life Society was established by a local South African Indian who took the spiritual name of Swami Sahajananda after his initiation. He was a very successful organizer and through mainly printing the books written by the original founder, Swami Sivananda, he spread the teachings in South Africa. The organization was also very involved in social service activities such as building schools and clinics for the poorer African communities, and by their feeding program they have made a significant impact on the poor of South Africa. The founder had passed away on 10 December 2007 leaving no successor to the organization. It has resulted in some internal leadership contests from the lay people as Swami Sahajananda did not train anyone to succeed him. The organization is currently led by lay devotees. It would be interesting to see how its future will unfold.

Concluding Comments

While the bulk of the Hindu community practices their respective traditions mostly centered on the many temples and shrines that have grown over the several decades of their life in South Africa, the educated middle class Hindus tend to oscillate toward the neo-Hindu organizations, which mainly spread the message of Vedanta type Hinduism. Vedanta is a Hindu philosophical tradition that pays more attention to the ancient texts called the Upanishads that originated out of the old Vedic ritual tradition. The philosophy of the Upanishads emphasizes the liberation of the individual either by realizing his or her oneness with the ultimate reality known in these texts as Brahman, or by entering into an eternal union or communion with Brahman. Whether it is the Satya Sai groups, the Ramakrishna Center, or the Divine Life movement, in addition to many other neo-Hindu movements, they all spread this message of individual self-realization. On the other hand, the traditional practices of Hindus focused around temple rituals and festivals continue to dominate the lives of Hindus in South Africa. Many of the village Hindu practices that may have lost their popularity in the Indian sub-continent in the face of rapid urbanization are still popular among the South African Hindus. This is perhaps due to their zeal to preserve their ancient traditions in the face of their isolation from the Indian sub-continent for so many decades. Now that they are connected with their fellow Hindus in India and around the world, they are bound to share the many changes that are occurring among the Hindu communities around the world, especially in the lives of the younger generations. These changes, as they occur in time, are worth documenting in the future.

Notes

- 1 In the early periods of the arrival of Europeans and Christianity in South Africa, Black populations were not encouraged to become Christians because the Dutch government in the seventeenth century introduced many reforms regarding African slaves and as a result the Calvinist Synod ruled that the slaves who convert to Christianity must be freed, a ruling the local farmers did not like because they needed African slaves to work on their farms. It was only in the late eighteenth century the London Missionary Society and other missionary societies from England and France began to convert African populations. (See Rita M. Byrnes, ed. *South Africa: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1996.)
- 2 The relationship between conversion and the continued affinity with their previous belief systems has been a subject of much discussion in the field of Missiology because converts continued to practice some of their things they did before the arrival of the new religion. African Christians generally demonstrate some affinity to their African beliefs and values. It is in this sense the conversion in Africa needs to be characterized differently.
- 3 Brahmin priests from India could not be brought as the diplomatic ties between India and South Africa did not exist until 1994 due to the system of apartheid.
- 4 Satya Sai Baba died on the Easter Sunday of April 2011. His followers believe that he attained Samadhi and that he knew of his death. In his lifetime he spoke of himself being the incarnation of a previous Sai Baba who lived in North India. He also spoke of himself being reincarnated as Prema Sai. No one knows how his worldwide organization will deal with this issue and who might be identified as the next Sai Baba!

PART III

Religion, Culture, and Society

CHAPTER 28

Religion and Art in Ile-Ife

Suzanne Preston Blier

During my first research trip in Ife, the ancient home of the Yoruba in southwestern Nigeria,¹ I accompanied the priest of the ancient messenger God, Oluorogbo, into the inner sanctum of the city's Oluorogbo temple. Before entering, we removed our shoes, then I, a priest of another shrine, and an accompanying Ife resident were invited to wash our faces with a special medicated solution. This was to mitigate any danger that the act of viewing might pose. As I scooped up the solution in my hand from the terra cotta vessel and bathed it over my face, some of this water mixed with the dust and sweat I had accumulated over the course of the day and dripped into my eyes. Blinking in response to this irritating composition, I immediately grew concerned. What was in this solution? Could it permanently alter my sight?

A few minutes later these feelings dissipated and were replaced by euphoria as my eyes cleared, and I realized there was no harm. The colors and images before me now were even brighter than I had remembered on first entering the inner sanctum of the temple. I doubt that there were any chemical properties in the solution that caused this reaction. Rather my response had come from internal factors. The act of washing one's face during a temple visit as a means of protection against the unseen sets up a visual and emotional chain reaction for the visitor—curiosity certainly, but also a desire for closer scrutiny, nervousness, relief, wonderment—all of which impact what one sees and how one responds.

This aspect of empowerment comes into play in various ways in addressing early Ife religious art. One of these is evoked in the depiction of the eyes in many early art works, in particular the outlining of the perimeter of the eye with what appears to be a reference to the use of antimony (black lead—called *tiroo*) by the Yoruba. Frequently worn today as a mark of beauty, a special empowered form of *tiroo* eyeliner also is used by both men and women because of the power it conveys. This use of potent eyeliner is identified especially with chiefs, smithy heads, great hunters, wealthy market women, and others because it is believed to enhance one's extrasensory ability and supernatural

“sight.” The wearers of these rare and expensive *tiroo* eye enhancements (which are made from the charred remains of powerful animals and plants) are purported to enable one to acquire whatever one desires—positions, commissions, wealth, a lover—without the subject of the empowered gaze necessarily being cognizant of what is happening.²

Some Ife sculptures of early and more recent eras are painted to emphasize the eyes as well. One of the ancient life size copper heads incorporates red and black linear forms around the eye area in the manner of spectacles. The head in question is made of nearly pure copper, suggesting that its additive power associations are linked to ritual primacy. Bertho and Mauny observed³ that the eyes of a sculpted head in Ife’s Obalufon temple were marked in a similar way, “with two white circles traced in chalk, as if one had wanted to make a pair of glasses.” Obatala diviner Akintitan, when asked about the eye-circumscribing lines on these Ife sculptures, noted⁴ that such lines convey the sense that it “can really see,” that the figure has a surfeit of supernatural power. Obatala chief Adedinni suggested to me⁵ in turn that this eye marking identifies the work as an *imole* (sacral power). According to Chief Adedinni, Ife rulers wear face covering crown veils because as kings, they are “like an *imole*. Because of this, one can’t look at [their] eyes.” These explanations are important to understanding the risk associated with seeing certain sacral forms (religious objects or the Ife ruler). The circling of eyes in early Ife sculptures seem to reinforce the mystical power of these objects and the possible dangers they carry for those who view them.

Early Ife art works—many of which date to the early fourteenth century—appear to have functioned somewhat analogous to memorials.⁶ These art works accord special primacy to individuals of renown. These same persons—kings, queens, warriors, queens, priests, hunters, court servants, and others—became supernaturals who are part of rituals today. In many cases, key portraiture attributes are featured: facial marking, differential body proportions, weight attributes, dress, coiffures, and other details. These factors of portraiture within the Ife corpus is supported as well by oral traditions that suggest the danger some artists faced as a result of creating works with such remarkably life-like features.⁷ The individual emphasis in Ife art reinforces Idowu’s view that these sculptures have important “lineage” ties.⁸ While Idowu is speaking here of art works in contemporary Ife (c. 1960), his perspective also seems to be relevant to ancient Ife art works, with these and related shrines being a central focus of rituals through the twentieth century.

Equally importantly, many art works are seen to be living and to interact with worshippers, these art works “coming alive” (*dahun*) and “responding” (*luti*).⁹ The latter term, as Abiodun et al. point out (1991:29), also is the source for a key aspect of artistic engagement—*iluti* or “call and response,” a prominent feature also of music, dance, and etiquette. The Yoruba word for verisimilitude, *luti*, is drawn from the same source, suggesting that sculptural naturalism attracts particular types of viewer engagement. The Yoruba term *ona*, which is translated as “art,” is interesting in this context because it is seen to reference the essential nature (*iwa*) of a given subject.

To Idowu, many early Ife sculptures are “believed to be the actual physical body of the ancestor who instead of dying in the normal way had metamorphosized himself in stone.”¹⁰ Ife sculptures in this way take on the identity (and sacral authority, *ase*) of the

associated supernatural, the art works themselves being referenced merely as images (*ere*) of Orisa (supernaturals).¹¹ The modern-era Ife belief that sculptures are capable of real engagement with worshippers and other viewers is an important part of this experience. This feature also is evoked through the Yoruba term, *ase* meaning the power to bring things to pass, a form of engagement central to Yoruba art and ritual.

Ghostly Apparitions: When Sculptures Laugh and Wink Back

Idowu provides a number of other examples of early Ife artifacts in which artist engagement and interaction are key. One of these is the “Shrine of the Moon,” a slab of stone that sparkled when rubbed with another stone:

... the moon lay in the shape of a flat slab of stone. The visitor took a small piece of stone and rubbed hard on its surface. As he rubbed, he was sure within a short time, to observe the movement of certain shadows: these were shades of people who had departed from earth, among them, he was sure to recognize someone! He must not be startled or frightened however, or his life would be in great danger.

Recognition, danger, and the peril of seeing and response here are co-joined. Timing also was important. As Idowu has pointed out, the rubbing of the moon stone “might not be undertaken by anyone at all during the appearance of the moon as it was dangerous.”¹²

The same way that Ife residents were encouraged to “rub” the “moon stone,” the highly polished surface of the handsome copper life-size mask of Obalufon suggests that polishing was an important part of the regular care given to this work. The copper-alloy, seated Ife figure found at the Niger River site of Tada also was polished on a regular basis. Linked to the fertility of people, crops, and fish, this sculpture was taken to the river weekly to be washed and rubbed with gravel.¹³ Today Ogboni brass sculptures similarly are kept polished, suggesting that interactive tactile experience was coupled with the visual primacy of surface details and patina.¹⁴ In other Ife works, among these terra cottas and sculptures of stone, paint was reapplied to the surface for a range of iconic and esthetic purposes. This affected the surface and evidenced active engagement with these arts in the course of local rituals.

The primacy of interactive engagement with religious art in Ife is discussed by Idowu in other ways as well.¹⁵ As he explains:

A young person who was lucky enough in those days [pre-twentieth century] to be taken by his parents to Ile-Ife would approach the city with feelings which baffled analysis. He was bound to be assailed on entering the city with successive waves of emotion. He would be almost afraid to look, for at every turn might be walking or lurking, for all he knew, some divinities or ghosts.

One particularly striking example of the interactive engagement can be seen in the sculpture of Baba Sigidi (Figure 28.1) known today as an ancient warrior and healer



Figure 28.1 Ife (Nigeria). Figure of Baba Sigidi. Photo S.P. Blier, 2004.

whose sculptural personification is perhaps early but not yet datable. Idowu describes¹⁶ Baba Sigidi as:

a Ife warrior of antiquity who, instead of dying in a normal way, converted himself into stone. He is [an] aged person wearing a raffia hat. [A] visitor would be assured that Baba still breathed faintly and winked his eyes just perceptibly and because the elder said so, he would discern faint breathing. It would be explained that in old days several of the great and strong men did not die as now but changed themselves to stone or walked through a cave to heaven.

The great warrior Baba Sigidi today is identified principally with healing. Originally a warrior under Obawinrin, he was the leader of the indigenous Igbo population at Ife. For this reason, Baba Sigidi's shrine is found in the Obawinrin compound. Fabunmi suggests¹⁷ that Baba Sigidi also was a key follower of the healer Elesije who also was part of the larger Obawinrin grouping. Important to his role at Ife today is the link between warriors and not only protection in battle but also aggression against the unseen dangers of the world.

Baba Sigidi, alas, neither winked at me nor breathed discernably when I viewed him on several occasions, but the drama of the setting where his sculpture is found is striking. His shrine is housed within a much larger roofed chamber. Nearby are a series of benches, grouped around an open space suggesting that participants in some cases were numerous. The Baba Sigidi altar itself is located behind a closed door at one side of this large hall and is visible only when the small ancillary interior chamber is opened. Constructed on an altar platform and wrapped in palm fronds and cloth, Baba Sigidi's prominent cone shape, bright two color hue, humanoid facial features, and raphia hat are enhanced by its dramatic setting.

Sequential Engagement: The Ore Grove Example

A number of other early Ife art works were displayed out of doors in special groves. One of the most striking of these locales is the Ore Grove complex which is dedicated to Oreluere, the ancient Ife hunter and fisherman,¹⁸ who is said to have been living at Ife when the founder of a new dynasty arrived here, a man named Odudua who also later became a god. Located just beyond the Ife city wall on Ifewara Road, the Ore grove is a beautifully landscaped outdoor setting at the very edge of metropolitan Ife. The position of the paths and clearings impacted ritual and viewing experience as they focused attention on a series of stopping points. Here as in other sites, Ife art works were positioned in such a way that they would be experienced progressively, one by one. The experience also was heightened by the sensorial effects of nature—not only the distinctive flickering light and coolness of the dense old growth forest,¹⁹ but also the sounds of birds and insects, and the rustling of leaves—qualities are not generally experienced in the busy cityscape of Ife.

As archaeologist Frank Willett notes, the Ore Grove is one of the few shrines in the city open both to the local population and to outsiders. As he points out “[i]t is curious that Europeans should have been permitted to visit the [Ore] grove without difficulty so long ago. It is still the only grove to which Europeans are freely admitted [even though] . . . devotees carry out their private ceremonies at all times of the year.”²⁰ The relative openness of this and certain other local groves to both family worshipers and outsiders may have extended to earlier eras as well. Because Ore was considered a great hunter and healer, his grove, like that of the warriors Baba Sigidi and Ogun, had a diversity of visitors, many of them coming here for medical issues linked to Ore's identity as an ancient healer and guardian of morals. As Idowu explains (1962:23) those who suffer disease or misfortune as a result of the breaking of taboos made offerings to the Ore image.

Art works in the Ore Grove were the subject of worship here into the 1950s at which time they were brought into the palace museum for safekeeping. None-the-less, the Ore grove's winding paths are carefully cleared each year before the annual ceremonies. A plan of the Ore Grove site was published in the early twentieth century along with the locales of the various art works therein.²¹ Although said to be much smaller than in the past, due to encroaching houses, the site today is still distinguished by tall majestic trees. Even in the grove's current state, the surrounding nature shapes the ritual experience in significant ways.

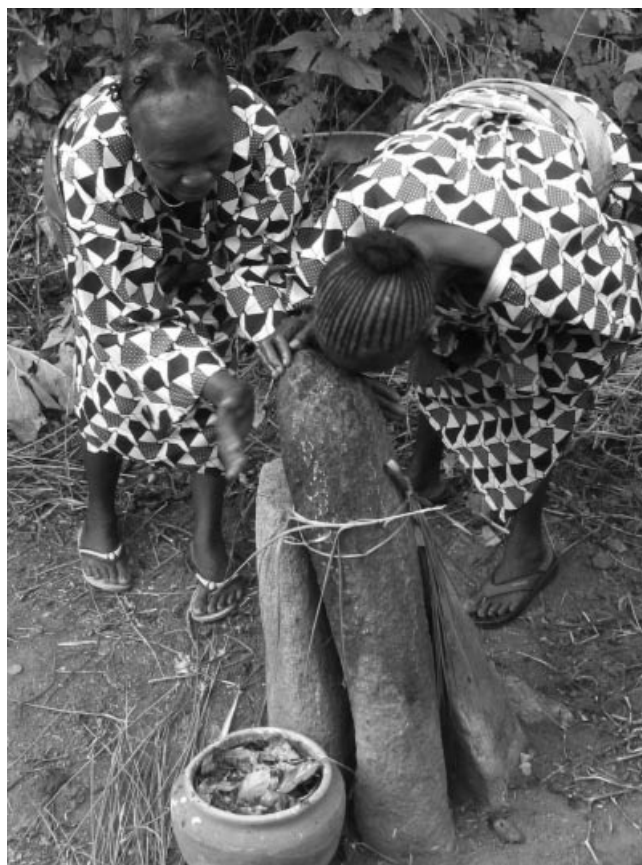


Figure 28.2 Ife (Nigeria). Ore family women at Ogun altar during annual Ore festival. Photo S.P. Blier, 2004.

Days before the annual Ore festival that I attended, I met with Chief Olopo, the priest in charge of Ore. He noted that his family had just begun the process of cleaning the year's vegetation away from the pathways, and that it was not yet accessible. Days later when I returned for the Ore festival, I was met at the entry by one of his assistants. Proceeding along the freshly cleared path toward the main ceremony area, the priest who served as my guide and escort stopped at various spots along the way to point out the original locales of each of the grove's stone sculptures as well as adjacent altars where small stone menhirs are still in use today. Certain prayers and ritual actions are associated with each, he explained.

The first site we stopped at, positioned in a cleared area about 250 feet into the grove was dedicated to the iron, hunting, and war god Ogun, and it consisted of three or four fragments of a granite menhir that originally formed a ten-foot tall knife-form menhir.²² Today, at this location participants draw liquid from an adjacent vessel of medicinal water to wash their heads of illness and misfortune before positioning their foreheads against a menhir fragment (Figure 28.2), drawing on the power of Ogun to counter



Figure 28.3 Ife (Nigeria). Figure of Olofefura from Ife Ore Grove. 13th–14th century. From Leo Frobenius, *The Voice of Africa* (I), 1913.

danger and bring well being. Some 85 feet beyond this, the path divides. On the left is another Ogun altar. A path to the right leads to a small clearing where the striking sculpture known as Olofefura (Figure 28.3) once stood.²³ This remarkable figure, which resembles a dwarf-like being similar to sculptures discussed above, was said historically to interact with viewers. Indeed this sculpture was “reputed to have the habit of hailing and welcoming visitors even from the distance with laughter and spontaneous joy as one does an old, long-missed friend. If, however, any visitor responded correspondingly, his facial features would remain permanently fixed in the contortion of mirthless laughter.”²⁴

Such actions were seen as a warning to control one’s response, or at least the outward signs thereof.²⁵

Through this Olofefura sculpture (and other Ore grove works), visitors to Ife (and this grove) were being warned that the city was a potentially dangerous place—a locale where sculptures, like the city’s royalty and gods, commanded extraordinary powers. Viewers had to control their responses to the wonders before them out of fear that they

might themselves be turned to stone. Olofefura, in laughing at those who engage with him, underscores the belief that sculptures are capable of real interaction, bringing political benefit or harm.

The Olofefura sculpture is said by researchers to represent the deity Ore.²⁶ The squat, distorted appearance of the work suggests at first a less accomplished artist, but in view of the striking number of sculptures portraying deformity in the early Ife art corpus, this work's identity as a god seems to be correct. Also, in Yoruba courts, dwarfs and other individuals with congenital deformities were quite common. The importance of congenital conditions and disease as signifiers of deity power links to, among other things, the breaking of taboos. So too is the close association between dwarfs (and hunchbacks) with Obatala, the deity most closely identified with Ife's autochthonous residents.²⁷ The proportions of this work, with the head comprising roughly one quarter of the body is consistent with its identity as deity as well (rather than say a servant or priest)—this based on the depiction of gods and kings here often with 1:4 body (head to body) proportions in contrast to priests and other "mere" humans who seem to be depicted with 1:5 or 1:6 proportions. The 1:4 proportions privilege the head relating to the importance of this body feature in terms of power, fortune, and wellbeing.

The hole in the top center of the forehead of this sculpture, (although now said to be a bullet hole) more likely was used for the insertion of a separately carved crown diadem or additive feather similar to those shown on many other ancient Ife sculptures. A three-strand choker is carved to encircle the neck, three coils of bracelets embellish the wrist, and three pendants hang from the left hip knot. Three is a number closely identified with the earth, ancestry, and autochthony—a number linked also to the Ogboni association dedicated in part to protecting the rights of indigenous landowners. The latter hip knot and pendants appear to identify this work also with ideas of ancestry, as identified with Obatala and an early creation myth which reveals that Obatala hid the necessary *ase* (sacral authority) for the earth's creation in the textile knot of his wrapper. His younger brother, Odudua, took the other materials from him while he was sleeping, but missed this key element, and only when Obatala arrived and made use of his *ase* was the earth finally made solid. Adjacent to this dwarf figure once were two stone kola nut boxes and covers. Kola was used for divination (to determine approval of the gods), and were important gifts (as well as trade items) in this area. They are also consumed as a mild stimulant. Beside the figure also stood a granite looping handled throne, a form identified with indigenous elites—here positioned on its side along with a slab of quartz of the sort used as a back rest in several Ife shrines identified with this same group.

In leaving this area of the grove where the squat figure of Ore once stood, we retraced our steps back to the main path, proceeding from here about 40 feet passing patches of an ancient potsherd pavement, and finally arriving at another clearing where a taller and more elegant granite sculpture originally was positioned. This work, called the Edena or Idena,²⁸ is identified as Ore's servant, wife or "gateman." Clearly male (i.e. without breasts), the reference to wife more likely indicates its status as a "servant." Another label identifies this work as Ore's (Awre's) slave, *gbanna*,²⁹ the name from which Edena seems to have derived. This Ore Edena figure is a work of notable

visual power with what were once said to be spiral-form iron inserts secured into the crown of the head to suggest hair. Another long lock of hair is carved in the stone and falls in front of the left ear. This conceivably represents the dreadlocks worn by powerful hunters, of which Ore was one. The iron spiral nails seemingly reference the spiral-form hair locks as well, suggesting the power (*ase*) associated with great hunters. As such, the Ore figure's iron coil coiffure not only adds to the visual effect, but also links the work to the larger group of hunters and blacksmiths (and their god Ogun) honored in this grove.

Like the previous work, this figure wears a cloth wrapper knotted at the left hip from which hang three elegant tassels, here too evoking ideas of ancestry and the Ogboni association dedicated to the rights of Ife's autochthonous residents. Three bracelets, perhaps references to works originally of iron, also encircle the wrists. Like the above Ore Olofefura figure, the gesture of this Ore sculpture—hands clasped together beneath the waist—recall the position of individuals today in service to a deity, king, or dignitary.³⁰ Similar to Olofefura, this sculpture is said originally to have been sheltered by a small shed, renewed or repaired each year prior to the annual festival.

A granite mudfish once was positioned in front of this taller Ore figure. As with this sculpture's hair, pieces of spiral form iron are inserted into the eyes for visual effect and perhaps to convey empowerment through reference to Ogun. The mudfish (African lung fish) is noted for its supplementary lung system that permits it to survive both in water and on land, qualities important to ideas of the Ife origins, but also to myths about the creation of the world more generally at Ife in which a mudfish is seen to have played a seminal role. In this context, the mudfish is identified as having carried (safeguarded) the sacred "calabash of existence" (the *igba-iwa*)³¹ believed to hold the power of the universe and its many secrets, a vessel which also is linked to female creative energy. This vessel also is closely identified with the earth's origins at Ife, and is said to be used to carry annual offerings to the gods to assure Ife's wellbeing.³² The identification of the mudfish with the earth's creation and with rituals that preserved life more generally is consistent with the mudfish's natural seasonal transition, not only the beginning of the dry season when the mudfish begins its estivation cycle (the fish equivalent of hibernation), but also the arrival of the rains when the fish is said to have vomited water into the dried river beds and springs, thereby assuring adequate moisture to meet the needs of local inhabitants. The mudfish, with its unusual ability to estivate, that is to survive in a hibernation-like state in dried spring or river beds using its ancillary lungs, seemingly comes back to life after rain again fills the pool or river bed with water. As such this fish is a particularly apt referent to the cycle of life with which Ore the hunter is closely identified.

Nearby were positioned two granite crocodiles (Figure 28.4), one of which is now missing, along with two "dropstones," the latter suggesting eggs, perhaps in reference to the era of creation at Ife.³³ The crocodiles are consistent both with Ore's identity as a great hunter and with the mythic identity of Ore as the inhabitant of Ife when it was still covered with water. Crocodiles also serve as messengers of water deities, a theme important in Ore worship as well.³⁴ Nearby also were found an array of other works, among these terra cotta palm wine containers. Several kola nut boxes also were observed by Frobenius near this figure.³⁵

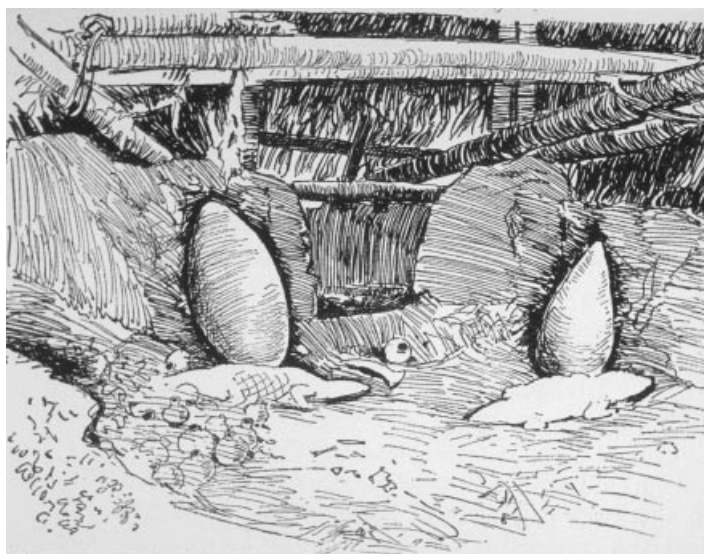


Figure 28.4 Ife (Nigeria). Crocodiles and eggs at Ore Grove. 13th–14th century. From Leo Frobenius, *The Voice of Africa* (I), 1913.

Behind this taller Ore sculpture stood two stone menhirs. The first of these is said to represent the shield (*asa*) of Ore. This rectilinear work integrates a set of five holes roughly an inch in diameter along its length. The number 5 seems to refer to humans in Ife myths (five fingers) as well as the world's creation, evoking among other things, the five-fingered chicken said to have scattered the particles of earth to the four corners of the universe when the earth was being formed. This sculpture also may have functioned as a means of measuring the Ife water level, a role in keeping with both the history of flooding at this site and an occupation that reflects close association between Oreluere, Ife's creation, and later era of floods at Ife.³⁶

The second menhir is a curving form ending in a point. This granite work is said originally to have stood at least 10 feet in height. It has been identified variously by researchers as an elephant tusk, phallus, and door bolt.³⁷ An elephant tusk is the most likely identity, both because of Ore's identity as hunter and because of his ties to Ife's autochthonous Obatala-linked population for whom the elephant is a key avatar. Interestingly, during the twentieth century, deceased elephant hunters received special funeral rites in an area atop a hill across from the Ore grove. Here, following the death of a famed local elephant hunter, a wooden sculpture carved to recall the deceased was set up to honor this man.³⁸

Elgee has noted³⁹ that during his visit to the Ore grove a number of earthenware pots were positioned in proximity to the stone carvings. One of the pots that he illustrates is a globe-shaped vessel with a narrow elongated neck, consistent with modern-era palm wine containers. Vessels of the same shape exist in fluorescence-era contexts and suggest that drink consumption and religious ritual in Ife have a long history. Bushes which grow nearby furnish the fresh whips used in these annual rituals as well.

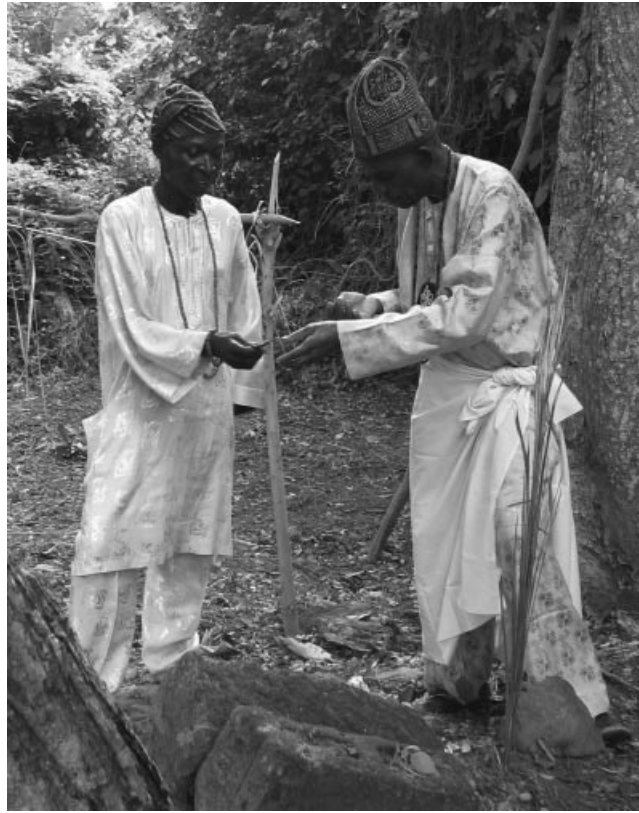


Figure 28.5 Ife (Nigeria). Chief Olopo making offerings in the Ore Grove during the annual ceremonies. Photo S.P. Blier, 2004.

These whips are employed by young boys of the family in a short display of combat and pain endurance near the end of the Ore Grove celebration, contests that call to mind ancient male puberty rituals.

At the rear of the area where the sculptures were positioned is where “cooking” is undertaken for related rites. It was here, during the Ore festival that I observed, where key offering rituals took place including the sacrifice of a goat, prayers, and special songs dedicated to Ore (Figure 28.5). Plant leaves and other materials are transported here by Chief Priest Olopo in his special antelope-skin bag, which also seems to honor of Ore’s identity as a hunter. In related offerings, the left hind foot and left ear were cut, the blood poured into a small boat-shaped pottery vessel and then poured by Chief Olopo on his left foot before being offered to Eshu as messenger to the gods. Fish is consumed as part of the meal. Whereas the emphasis on the left foot suggests Ore’s identity with the autochthonous deities (and Obatala supporters) who are identified with the left (as opposed to new dynasty royals linked to the right), the boat shaped offering vessel and the fish seem to reinforce Ore’s identity with Ife’s mythic beginnings (when the earth was covered with water). Only men and postmenopausal women are allowed to participate in this rite.



Figure 28.6 Ife (Nigeria). Ore Grove, Chief Olopo at the end of the annual Ore festival. Photo S.P. Blier, 2004.

Behind this open-space area stands a modern-era cement structure that has been painted with a vivid multi-color tableau representing different parts of the ritual. Seen here as well are worshippers positioned in front of the figure of a seated priest (Olopo?) in a tall conical crown. Near this area the sculpture of a dog was found⁴⁰ consistent with the importance of dogs to Ogun, god of iron, war, and the hunt and also reflecting the primacy of dogs as sacrifices to this god. When the Ore rites concluded, women of the family greet the Olopo with song near the entry to the grove. Here other members of the quarter, along with drummers, jubilantly accompany Chief Olopo and other priests back to the Olopo's home adjacent to this grove (Figure 28.6). These rituals—like others—serve in part to renourish and reactivate the forces of the past that figure so prominently in the lives of ongoing Ife residents.

Temples and Interactive Engagement

Shrines in which related ancient art works were found included the interiors of palaces and temples, public altars, and forest groves situated throughout the city. Archeological evidence suggests that shrine construction as well as related furniture and offerings were varied. Shrines included small thatch-roofed structures sometimes with walls of

earth (the Ita Yemoo site), open-walled structures supported by corner posts (the Ore and Lafogido sites), altars set up in courtyards, as well as interior chambers within larger architectural complexes (Baba Sigidi and Obalara's Land). Potsherd and stone pavement areas distinguish many of these settings, sometimes bearing semi-circular cut-away areas where earthen altars were constructed for the display of various objects and offerings (among these vessels, pieces of iron, and beads). The ancient copper Obalufon mask and terra cotta Lajua head provide another interesting example. Both were housed in the palace Omirin room with royal and ritual viewing of these works presumably limited to those with inner court access—the king, his family, certain courtiers, and priests.

Orientation toward the cardinal directions appears to have been important as well. Deity temples and pavements often face north-south or east-west, as do interior altars and the arts associated with them. In a fluorescence-era example with possible ramifications for other artifacts, the Ita Yemoo copper alloy king figure was found lying on its back facing skyward, its head oriented roughly toward the east.⁴¹ The east-west position of the figure suggests that orientation was linked to use and signification. Impressing viewers with the splendor of art also was important in some fluorescence-era Ife sites, among these Wunmonije, where an extraordinary corpus of copper-alloy sculptures was found with life-size cast heads, a half figure of a king, several crowned heads with integrally cast crowns, a scepter mount with a gagged head, bracelets, and other works. While some Ife scholars have assumed that this site comprised objects brought in from other locales, it is just as likely that these works were housed here prior to their burial and/or served as altar furnishings. The visual impact of such an extraordinary corpus of works when seen both individually and together would have been remarkable.

The massing together of large numbers of impressive sculptures for display in order to make a bold impression is likely present in other contexts as well. According to Bernard and William Fagg,⁴² Ife's Iwinrin grove "is the richest in sculpture of all the Ife sites so far known . . . [F]ragments [having been] recovered from part of at least eight or ten terra cotta figures, most of them practically life-size." The number of works and their life-size scale—including an enormous two-thirds life-size multi-person terra cotta throne sculptural grouping—would have left a striking impact. Because many of the terra cotta heads collected by Frobenius in the early twentieth century came from the Iwinrin site, originally this locale was even more remarkable. In addition to naturalistic terra cotta heads and figures and cone-shaped forms, the Iwinrin Grove also housed a fragment of a figure with snakes.

The interactive nature of art as part of ongoing rituals at Ife is heightened by acts of ongoing image covering and revelation. In mid-twentieth century contexts, some early Ife sculptures were kept hidden (or buried) during most of the year and brought out for viewing only during ceremonial contexts. The modern era act of burying sculptures between ceremonies extends back to the fluorescence era period when sculptures were positioned at the Obalara's Land site. This is so that, as Eluyemi notes⁴³ the "*orisa* does not 'sleep.'" At the Ife site of Osangangan Obamakin, the fluorescence-era terra cotta head that represents this king/god accordingly was kept buried below overturned vessels when not in use. The unveiling of this work for closer scrutiny featured in preparations for the annual rites. Several of the copper alloy castings found at Ita Yemoo were

discovered inside a large terra cotta pot⁴⁴ of the sort traditionally used at Ife to store valuables for safekeeping. During the Ife Obatala festival today, stone figures representing Obatala and his consort Yemoo are covered with a white cloth and bound tightly with cord before being transported to a special shrine across town. Here, after being unwrapped, the works are placed in a “niche” where they are the focus of prayers by prostrating participants. These examples suggest the interdependence of religious ritual and viewing, as well as the unique qualities of viewer–object interaction with associated individuals experiencing works through an enhanced sense of religious primacy and emotional and esthetic anticipation. These contexts of viewing sometimes (as here) followed a carefully choreographed parading of the wrapped art works. Their subsequent revelation (uncovering) and ritual painting suggest that viewing was shaped in part by visual anticipation.

As we have seen, the viewing of religious art in early Ife is defined by a range of factors. Related settings include small and larger forest groves, intimate interior shrines, raised pavement altars, and larger temple complexes, and suggest the care with which viewing is shaped for maximum visual, ritual, and emotional impact. Regular, as well as empowered and interactive viewing, defines Ife art engagement in important ways. Even the simple act of hiding a work through much of the year and then revealing it for a brief period to a select group of observers promotes a unique viewing context in which the work of art is discovered anew over the course of its lifetime. Aspects of movement (of body, light sources, performance) are important to this as well. “Seeing” works of art here is necessarily dependent on what each viewer brought to art viewing: prior expectations, state of mind, ritual considerations each play a part in shaping this experience.

Notes

- 1 Sections of this article are taken from two works, Blier 2009 and Blier 2012.
- 2 Odewale, Personal Communication.
- 3 Bertho and Mauny 1952:104.
- 4 Akintitan, Personal Communication.
- 5 Adedinni, Personal Communication.
- 6 See Lawal 1977.
- 7 Idowu 1962:208. E. B. Idowu's 1962 monograph entitled *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* is a key source on Ife religion. While the book's title suggests a broader engagement with Yoruba religion, the bulk of his research and analysis focuses on ritual forms and related cultural practices in Ife. In addition to the core data included in this volume, the book also makes clear how different in many ways Ife religious traditions are from those of other Yoruba regions, even if overlaps exist. As such Idowu's volume offers a caution to studies that seek to understand early Ife art from the vantage of Yoruba religious form more broadly. Idowu's research additionally makes clear how Ife's religious life is intimately tied to the history of this city. Other sources that offer insight into Ife and area rituals and shrines include Fabunmi (1969), Parratt (1985), Adediran and Arifalo (1992), and Olupona (1991).
- 8 Idowu 1962:132.

- 9 Abiodun et al. 1991:13.
- 10 Idowu 1962:13.
- 11 Idowu 1962:66.
- 12 Idowu 1962:11–12.
- 13 Willett 1967:51.
- 14 See also Blier 2004.
- 15 Idowu 1962:11–12.
- 16 Idowu 1962:13.
- 17 Fabunmi 1969:10.
- 18 Chief Adedinni adds (Personal Communication) that Oreluere (Ore) was a servant of Obalufon. But he also points out that Ore was from the larger Obalufon family.
- 19 Among the other trees in this grove are Peregun, Akoko (linked to coronations, and Oro, a yellow fruit bearing tree, which is also linked to Oramfe, the indigenous god of thunder and lightning.
- 20 Willett 1970b:308.
- 21 Dennett 1910.
- 22 Willett 2004:S1.
- 23 This figure once was sheltered by a low enclosure of branches and palm fronds. Similar small open-fronted shrines with a palm frond canopy are shown in a vessel from Obalara's Land. This structure was built anew at the onset of each Ore annual ceremony (Murray and Willett 1958:138). Frobenius who saw the work half a century earlier, noted (vol. 1: 298) that the figure "was housed in a badly damaged little hut whose thatch almost hid it." These small structures when they were first built served to direct the viewers gaze, to focus one's attention directly on the object at hand.
- 24 Idowu 1962:11.
- 25 This feature suggests analogy with what Alfred Gell references (1999) as the role of artworks as traps.
- 26 Dennett 1910:21; Talbot (1926 II:339 and Allison 1968:13. Chief Olopo identified the work to Murray and Willett 1958:140 as Ore's servant.
- 27 Verger 1957:481.
- 28 Dennett 1910:22; Allison 1968:13. The name Idena was first provided by Frobenius (1913:90ff, and in passing), who attempted to abscond with its head (Murray and Willett 1958:138). Fabunmi suggests (1985:14) that the name Edena and the biblical Eden may be linked, an idea in keeping with Ore's association with the origins of life at Ife. This name, following Western biblical traditions, is in keeping with Ore's identity as Ife's first man, a man said to have lived at Ife before the time of a great flood here.
- 29 Talbot 1926:vol. II:339.
- 30 Odewale, Personal Communication.
- 31 Fasogun (1976 paper p.1) also identifies her as the keeper of Igba Iwa. This term also appears in the general reference to the time of creation, i.e. *igba iwa se* (Adediran "The Early Beginnings of the Ife State" 1992:81).
- 32 Adediran 1992 "Early Beginnings":81; Fasogun n.d.1. This same *igba-iwa* vessel is said to have held the necessary Ife offerings conveyed to the heavens each year in exchange for wellbeing and plenty (Fabunmi 1985:194).
- 33 Hambly suggests (1935:465) however that they depict stone anvils (Hambly 1935:465) referencing perhaps the importance of iron technology to hunters in the creation of related tools; a similar drop stone in iron was found in the Ogun Mogun shrine.

- 34 Dennett 1910:111. Found nearby was a rectilinear stone box cover, also showing a snake grasping a frog, along with a 10. 5 inch tall form (Willett 2004:S11) which appears to be a skeuomorph of a scepter. Shown on the ground in front of the larger Ore figure in Frobenius' illustration is a palm wine vessel.
- 35 Frobenius 1913, I:296. See also Willett 2004:S9.
- 36 Elgee noted (1908:342) that during his visit a number of earthenware pots were positioned in proximity to the stone carvings, these in keeping with palm wine consumption in related rituals. Bushes that grow nearby furnish the fresh whips used in the annual rituals. These whips are employed by young boys of the family responsible for Ore worship in a short display of combat and pain endurance that takes place towards the end of the Ore Grove celebration, contests that call to mind ancient male puberty rituals in this center.
- 37 Willett 2004: S-1; Dennett 1910:22; Frobenius 1912, I:326; Talbot 1926, II:340.
- 38 Willett 1965:8.
- 39 Elgee 1908:342.
- 40 Willett 2004: T317.
- 41 Willett 1959b:189.
- 42 Fagg 1960:113.
- 43 Eluyemi n.d.:43.
- 44 Willett 1959b.

CHAPTER 29

Sufi Arts

Engaging Islam through Works of Contemporary Art in Senegal

Allen F. Roberts and Mary Nooter Roberts

A dynamic Senegalese Sufi movement known as the Mouride Way is inspired by the writings and life lessons of Sheikh Amadou Bamba (1853–1927), a pacifist, poet, and saint (*Wali Allah*, or “Friend of God”).¹ Late nineteenth-century Senegal was marked by political turmoil, and Bamba’s piety and sacralization of work proved especially apposite to the transition from small kingdoms to French colonial capitalism. While some Senegalese called for holy war against the French, Bamba professed that his only *jihad* would be against the venality of his own soul, and his only “weapon” a stylus with which to write the Word of God (Babou 2007). Still, colonial authorities found Bamba to be “surreptitiously revolutionary” and sent him into seven years of exile (1895–1902) in the French equatorial colony of Gabon, followed by four years in Mauritania and long house arrest in Senegal (Dumont, 1975, 34).

Bamba performed his greatest miracles during his Gabonese exile. When he wrote of escaping the cruel devices of French persecution, he proved himself a saint as did the secrets that God and the Prophet revealed to him during his tribulations (Bamba, n.d.). Bamba still inspires perseverance in today’s circumstances of difficulty and want, bringing his promise of miraculous transformation to bear upon the most intractable problems of everyday life (see A. Roberts, 1996).

Senegal is an arid place where life has never been easy due to poor soils, drought, desertification, and other problems common to countries lying just south of the Sahara. The republic has few natural resources, and certainly none greater than the creative resolve of its people. Realizing these conditions, Bamba developed a philosophy—indeed, an “exaltation”—of hard work for which Mourides are renowned (Magassouba, 1985, 28; Couty et al., 1972). His celebrated exhortations include “Work as if you’ll never die, Pray as if you’ll die tomorrow,” and the dicta so euphonious in Wolof, *Ligey ci topp, Yalla la bokk*, “Work is among the ways to adore God”; and *Yall, Yall, bey sap tool*, “Call upon God, but farm your field first!” (Anon., 1999). Following the Saint’s teachings, supporting one’s family is deemed more important than all else, and if toiling to

do so occasionally or even regularly precludes devotional responsibilities ordinary to Muslims, so be it. Work will bring blessing and salvation of its own.

The power and practicality of Bamba's messages have enabled Mourides to thrive in harsh contexts, and especially in the sprawling inner-cities of Senegal's fast-growing urban complexes, helping people to "create work where there is none," as the contemporary artist Viyé Diba has put it. Indeed, many Mourides express the depth of their devotional commitment by making art. Some are driven to such pursuits by a felt need for expression, while others turn to arts because, as the graphic artist Yelimane Fall has said of the hardscrabble city of Pikine where he lives, "there are no jobs here, no salaries, and all we have, all we can make, is art."²

Works of Contemporary Art in Senegal

For nearly fifty years now, Dakar has been an epicenter of contemporary art, not just for continental Africa but for the entire world. The particularly rich history of such expressive ferment, especially as fostered by Léopold Sédar Senghor, the celebrated poet, philosopher, social activist, and first president of Senegal, is well known and subject to ongoing analysis.³ Senegalese artists participate in worldwide movements as well as local ones, emphasizing whichever loyalties may seem advantageous at any given time.

Many contemporary artists in Senegal are Mourides. One named Moussa Tine exclaims that "Mouride art exists! It is an attitude for Mourides. It is not an art form that can be presented as such, though; rather, it is a way of reasoning. The Mouride [epistemology] is really creativity. It is work and it has a direct relationship to art." Contemporary artists in Senegal need not be Mourides to participate in this "way of reasoning," to the extent that they create works that refer to Amadou Bamba or the principles he articulated through his writings. Indeed, several prominent artists who are *not* Mourides, explicitly at least, base their work on the precepts presented here.

Mourides and other Senegalese Sufis are called *taalibe*, a loanword from Arabic that refers to "devotees." Some are especially known for their hard work, and none more so than the Baye Falls, so named after Chiekh Ibra Fall (c.1858–1930), Bamba's first and most fervent follower. Some Baye Falls are ascetic in their deep commitment to work itself, and must be instructed to cease their toils at the end of the day lest they fall into exhaustion. Several renowned Mouride contemporary artists consider themselves first and foremost as Baye Fall *taalibe*. The late Moustapha Dimé and Moussa Tine are good examples.⁴

Moustapha Dimé (1952–1998) was a widely recognized sculptor who created works from recycled materials and especially from jetsam found on the rocky shores of Gorée Island, the infamous entrepot of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Dimé maintained a studio on Gorée that perched like an aerie on a basaltic cliff below the ruins of a French fortress protecting the harbor of Dakar.⁵ Among the triumphs of his all-too-brief career, Dimé's work was selected for the Venice Biennale of 1993 and shown later the same year at the Museum for African Art in New York City. His ennobling sculptures, especially of women, are exhibited regularly (Bouttiaux, 2009, 260–1; Kart, 2007).

In a long interview with Thomas McEvilley (1993:33, 40, 51–2), Dimé proved himself a fiercely independent Mouride, but one contrite after surviving a period of emotional distress and alcoholism. As he said, he regained “equilibrium” through his sculpture. “For me, sculpture is a form of practicing Islam. When Islam first came to Senegal, Muslims destroyed Senegalese sculpture—anything related to sculpture they destroyed on the basis of the Islamic prohibition against figuration. But I think that is a shallow interpretation of the Islamic text, because God created visual beauty in the world. And there is nothing more beautiful than a work of art, so the work of art is very close to God, and should be part of God’s sacred text, not a part of that which is destroyed for the sake of that text.”

Such poignancy is further reflected in Daniel Sotiaux’s (1997:13) assessment of the artist: “Monsieur Dimé is a deep believer. As a Mouride, he believes in work, in the elevation of humanity, in the “becoming” of people. His sculpture participates in this effort: He looks behind the material traces of humanity hidden in each of the many misfortunes (*sortilèges*) of life . . . Such a necessary doubt awakens, giving hope to other becomings (*devenirs*).”

In 1996 and 1997, we held two long conversations with Dimé at his Gorée studio, during which he spoke with a deep conviction shared among many Mourides. The second of these interviews was only months before he became debilitated by what would prove a fatal illness. One can sense in Dimé’s words that the artist had begun to achieve a long-sought reckoning with God:

I don’t separate the artist in me from the *taalibé*, because it is the artist who is a *taalibé*. And I think that fundamentally, what permits me to understand that I live the Creation is that really, it is the life of a *taalibé* that has given me this strength. I work just as other Mourides do in places like the Colobane junkyard of Dakar.⁶ It’s the same thing, except that I work through expression. I work with my sentiments and emotions. I work with a certain sense of form and I discern a certain discourse in my sculpture. But what is certain is that I have the same spirit of work, the same way we as Mourides transcend our circumstances, as someone does who is creating travelers’ trunks and kitchen utensils from recycled materials in Colobane. I no longer feel about my work as I once did [in allusion to his period of emotional disturbance and alcoholism]. Now when I work, I no longer feel like someone who comes, works, and leaves. For me, work is even a prayer. Do you understand what I mean? I divinely transcend myself through my work.

Here at the end of the twentieth century, we recognize that Sheikh Bamba came to Senegal and spoke to us of the Muslim religion, but that he did not reform Islam. Rather, he gave it a much clearer comprehension. If you wish, Sheikh Bamba liberated Islam from its shackles (*entraves*) because there was a period [elsewhere in nineteenth-century west Africa] when Islam was combat. Then Sheikh Bamba arrived and he said to Muslims, “You are not on Earth to kill. You are here to make an effort to transcend yourselves through God. Every day, you have the possibility that God will permit you to *accede* to that.” How does one accede? There are people who use prayer to accede to God, there are others who use work—it all depends upon the comprehension of the person who takes the path toward God . . .

“Each person lives in his own personal prison. Each one has the possibility to break the chains of this prison to find himself. Cheikh Ibra Fall had a way of life that surpassed

spirituality in space and time. He was not interested in the material world. He was nothing but light. He metamorphosed into light through *fana*.⁷ He has the ability to speak with the ocean, the wind, to see angels, and to intervene with people from very far away. This is *batin*.

Batin is an interior light. You can read on a person's forehead that he is Mouride. This is a capacity to go where one must go [anywhere in the world] that belongs neither to the rich nor the poor, but to the person who takes the time to develop the light of *batin*. A person creates this environment himself. I am speaking of a very spiritual side. This discourse that I am trying to articulate is that God is here in permanence, in all His grandeur, which gives us the chance to be what we are. The individual emerges. Material will be material. Spirit will be spirit. The two should go together, they need each other. It is the manner in which people intellectualize . . .

I live God in permanence. When I work, I take all, all for God. I give all to God . . . At the end of the twentieth century, people are sinking to the lowest depths. People are only here for consumption. They are in the process of making a way of life. Trying to clutch the ladders. Greece, Egypt, Europe, and the United States—all civilizations have fallen because of a materialism in which God has been killed. It is finished. To be oneself, one must have God in oneself. Today, I want to do good . . .

My work is my life. We live with God. The problem is when we try to have many things. Work brings many things. I am always someone who is transformed through emotional work. There is always the possibility that one can reach God. The best way is through work, with the heart, with wellbeing, with pleasure. To cultivate this notion is to be like someone who will never die.

Like Moustapha Dimé, Moussa Tine (1953–) is motivated by profound thoughts. Tine attended the National School of Fine Arts in Dakar, where he learned to paint with acrylics. As a member of the school's "second generation," Tine saw himself "breaking the mold" of earlier artists constrained by the cosmopolitan assumptions of Senghorian cultural politics (Grabski, 2001:75–6, 103–7). His "Elevations" series begun around 1997 exemplifies how his sense of purpose is based upon the uplifting messages and practices of mystical Islam in the lives of Baye Falls such as he (Figure 29.1).

Tine began his career in the most humble of circumstances, as one of the boys calling to passengers of a *car rapide* minibus, helping them on board and taking their fares. Given the competition for the scant profits of public transport in Dakar, success in such menial labor requires brassy aggression; yet early on, Tine manifested his deeper side by painting Mouride devotional imagery in and on his bus that was noticed and requested by other drivers. Tine's artistic career emerged from the street, and he has not forgotten the anxieties of a boy by himself, seeking to support himself in the city. Indeed, his humility as an adult is a direct consequence of the blessings he feels he has received from his own hard work as guided by the benevolence of Sheikh Amadou Bamba.

Several of Tine's "Elevations" works are entitled or refer directly to Baye Falls (Figure 29.1). In the late 1990s, Tine used thin sheets of recycled plywood to create abstracted human figures that he attached to large canvases painted in earth-tone acrylics and stressed with sand and other substances. "There are specific symbols" in the paintings, Tine asserts. "I see an elevation in the Baye Fall . . . It is a spiritual elevation, and an eleva-



Figure 29.1 “Rhythm Baye Fall,” collage from the “Elevations” series by Moussa Tine, 1998. Acrylic on canvas, recycled plywood; 81.5 × 100 cm; private collection. Photo by Don Cole with permission.

tion of the person . . . In Africa, the grouping of individuals is very important . . . People praying together create a certain atmosphere of forgiveness which in turn allows an individual to reach a state of bliss more easily. The group facilitates this process. This is why there is always a presence of masses of Mourides in my works . . . And groupings of people produce rhythm, but an innocence has been discovered as well. I am always trying to interpret the grouping of people, a grouping which will lead to the ideal.”

By 1999, Tine had taken his “Elevations” experiment another step by replacing the plywood figures with metal ones bolted to an underlying frame. As he explained, “with many stages and moving from series to series, I decided to produce works with volume, because elevation is made from levels. There is also shadow, which plays an important role . . . People have always wanted to touch my paintings because they thought they had volume, only to find that they do not. It seemed time to enter the field of volume.”

“I look for metal in my environment, and this is why it takes a long time to make these works,” Tine explains, with reference to the anthropomorphic figures of his works. “I studied the elements, and I pulled apart an automobile muffler to find this piece of metal. It comes to me already slightly bronze-colored because of the heat it has known, and it is very strong metal. Specialists have studied it so that it will last a long time. My choice is related to my earlier work with *car rapides*: these things are connected through an existence that is mine. You can always feel in my work the metal, the iron, the thread.” And as Tine added in a different conversation, muffler metal is chosen because it “can take the heat”—it has proven itself, it has resisted its own destruction, it has continued to do its job despite challenges put to it. Such a carefully considered choice of materials means that the muffler metal itself is less the point than what the metal has done and can do. Work itself becomes a tangible quality.

Hidden Sides of Contemporary Art

Moustapha Dimé spoke of the “interior light” of *batin*—that is, the “côté caché” as Senegalese say in French, of all that is evident in human acts and products. *Batin* consists of God’s signs, *aya*, that can be discerned in all aspects of life; but it can also be a consciously entered realm, and its signs can be incorporated into art and revealed to some but concealed from others. A number of contemporary artists with whom we have worked over the years investigate *batin* in other ways, and sometimes even more evidently than did Dimé. Viyé Diba is one.

Diba (1954–) was trained in art education at the National School of Fine Arts in Dakar, where he himself has been a professor for quite some years now. His education included a stint at the Teachers’ College for Art Education in Dakar, and he then went on to Nice to take a doctorate in Urban Geography. While one of Senegal’s most prominent international artists, Diba remains involved with local environmental issues and considers himself a researcher as he teaches and makes art.⁸

Although he is best known for his acrylic paintings, Viyé Diba prefers to call himself a *plasticien*—that is, someone shaping and sculpting through an *engagement* with his media. As Diba says, when he begins a piece he “communicates” with his materials, seeking to understand their properties through an “exchange” with them that will lead to their use in his work (Pommier, 2003). A principle guiding such conceptualization of the material realm is the *weight* that provides an anchoring stability to his compositions. Diba often binds a knotted strip of fabric to the lower edge of a painting so that it seems to pull downward, and he sometimes hangs a piece of wood from the work to enhance a sense of gravity and groundedness. Ropes and bundles add to the visual, haptic, and even sonoral impact of Diba’s works (Figure 29.2).

Diba feels a need to “interrogate” the materials he uses. When “African artists *aggress* wood, as one aggresses the human body with scarifications, tattoos, and the like,” he asserts, “the body reacts. There is a dialog, a total communication between the medium and the person who creates . . . For me . . . it is a matter of seeing through my artistic preoccupations how I can recuperate materials and valorize them, elevate them to the dignity of a work of art” (interview in Huchard, 1994:24). Paint is mixed with sand to make it more tactile and an object in its own right, for instance; and Diba’s paintings mounted on recycled wood are gouged and wrenched and pulled and twisted to test their expressive limits. By these means, Diba makes a subtle point that resonates with Sufi understanding of the hidden side of all things, including the very media he deploys in his art. That is, Diba wishes to allow the wood, cloth, or pigment to *prove* what it can do as it resists his “aggression.” In so doing, he honors the substances while moving a step closer to understanding their mysteries.

In a conversation with Diba in 1999, the artist asserted that

. . . what I would like to do is develop a relationship between my work and the spirit of Mouridism . . . For example . . . you can see through the spirit of the multicolored garments [they make for Baye Falls] created from fabric remnants gathered in neighborhood tailor shops, that these scraps will not be isolated and unable to communicate. They . . . are



Figure 29.2 “Suspension” by Viyé Diba, 2001. Acrylic on hand-woven cotton strip cloth, recycled wood; 80 × 99 cm; private collection. Photo by Don Cole with permission.

used like a radiation of color, and it is as if the pockets were bursting forth, showing their contents. They reveal what is hidden. Therefore I think it is a kind of dialectic between the secret, which constitutes the pockets in my work, and their outburst in a kind of revelation, a discovery of light, truth, and knowledge . . .

Mouridism is also *batin*, or hidden knowledge, a kind of avant-garde knowledge. I would like to transform this aspect, this parallel to my work. I haven't wanted my painting to be a work of simple communication, but rather a work that will reach a certain universal dimension through its spirit of popular philosophy. It should find its definition in a universal history of ideas. The pieces of fabric that I sew into the pockets of my paintings create light, they reveal *batin*, the hidden things. My problem is not representation as usual. It is another vision that reveals but is not at the disposition of everyone, in what I call the process of elevating oneself to reach this avant-garde goal, because the conception of work from such a point of view is more abstract than the usual creative process. I am in the ideology of the least known. I am inside it. My attitude relative to the materials I use creates distance, an abstract distance. But I am also very close to this world.

As a further example of the impact of mysticism on Diba's thinking, in December, 2001, the artist discussed a free-standing sculptural work with us called “Musical Materiality” now in the collections of the Fowler Museum at the University of California, Los Angeles (Figure 29.3). As he explained:



Figure 29.3 “Musical Materiality” by Viyé Diba, 1998. Recycled wood, cloth, paint, rope; 157 × 168 cm; UCLA Fowler Museum TR2002.1.65a-x. Photo by Don Cole with permission.

... this work was made from pieces of wood wrapped in cloth of many colors. The wood is old and in an advanced state of deterioration. It has soul and memory, and it attests to the rapport between people and their materials. The pieces of wood are like the clubs of Baye Falls [carried to demonstrate their moral and physical fortitude], but they also recall the keys of marimbas (*balaphons*). When one strikes the keys, the sound continues; there is a musical sense to this piece, then. The way I have wrapped the wood recalls the spirit of Baye Falls, through *njaxas* in Wolof, or ‘mixing’—a bringing together of elements [in their patchwork clothing] that used to belong to different things. That is, there is unity in this diversity, rather like Mouride philosophy. This is a conceptualization of a Baye-Fall mode of working, energy, and force. In suspending these wooden objects I am playing between the experience and practice of African sculpture understood through its *weight*, for we have a culture through our dance and music that possesses a force bringing us down to earth.

While Viyé Diba is preoccupied with the “gravity” of life in Senegal, his close friend and fellow artist Moussa Tine considers the ethereal:

An artist receives many stimuli, and many ideas boil in his mind. There is both a philosophical side [to making art] and a material one. When I opened my studio in the Artists’ Village of Dakar, I discovered that the Chinese [building the adjacent soccer stadium] used to cut metal here and so I gathered bits and pieces to use in my work. I place the figures I make from this material over a background that I make very carefully as the source from which my forms take shape. I always add a little sand, a little soil [to my acrylic paints], and the colors and textures show the transformation of my materials. There is always light, for matter and light create form. This is how I interpret the backgrounds [of my paintings], and light, matter, and form are the elements with which I have always worked.

Tine has continued to develop his thinking and in 2001, he began producing framed works devoid of the acrylic backgrounds that characterized his earlier production. These are mounted some inches from the wall, he said, so that the metal figures will throw shadow across a void.

Whoever says shadow says light. Whoever says shadow says shape. Whoever says shape says matter. Whoever says matter says life. I would like to instill in this matter all my spirituality. I express myself through my painting in the hope of discovery.

The Holy Man . . . is the shadow of the Prophet . . . The fact that he was exiled [by French colonial authorities], the fact that he was not understood . . . and the fact that people chased him from his home saying that he was preparing for war [when he was a pronounced pacifist]. All these things have happened to the Prophet, too. Bamba is the Shadow of the Prophet. This is how I interpret the Shadow of the Prophet.

In other words and in ways so subtle that they would, in all likelihood, be unknown to someone visiting a gallery to purchase one of his works, Tine has introduced a dimension of Mouride philosophy known to *him*. This is what matters: As a Sufi, Tine seeks to proceed along a path to divine knowledge, and the hidden references of his paintings and sculptures need not be known to anyone but himself. By mounting his works at a distance from the wall, a shadow may be created that all can see; but this shadow can refer to other shadows, and remind Tine of the pious relationship between Amadou Bamba and the Prophet Mohammad.

Spirituality of the Global and the Local

Contemporary artists like Moustapha Dimé, Viyé Diba, and Moussa Tine generally begin with references to life around them. The exigencies of urban Senegal provide themes and materials for their works, while Mouride philosophy and praxis permit deeper purposes to be plumbed, even if non-Mouride viewers may ignore such dimensions. Each of these men transcends locality, thrusting his works into dialogue about style and intention with artists from around the world. In recent years, the iron sculptor and acrylic painter Ndary Lo (or Lô, 1961–) has come from the opposite direction of the global influences that inspired his early work to a local spiritual grounding for his expression.

Lo has garnered a great deal of international attention in recent years. From the start, his larger-than-life, impossibly stretched figures made from recycled iron rebar have been celebrated for a vitality and dynamism that also suggest mystical profundity.⁹ Indeed, as art critic Sylvain Sankalé (2004, 29) puts it, “the driving force of Ndary Lo’s work resides in his spirituality,” and his works “occupy space in a surprising manner, like a compass tracing a curve into infinity.” Such a sense is especially evident in a series of elongated iron figures in postures of prayer that “lift their arms toward the sky, palms open, offering. They remain there, for an instant, perhaps for eternity” (Figure 29.4).¹⁰ However, Sankalé (2004, 29–30) stresses that Lo’s spirituality



Figure 29.4 “Praying Figure” by NDary Lo, studio photo 2006. Iron rebar, paint; approx. 180 cm; collection of the artist. Photo by the authors.

is not one of these spiritualities of shoddy quality (*de pacotille*) that the fatuous hypocrites (*cagots*) of all sorts that our new century discovers and reveres, exhibit like an indecent wound. Instead, his spirituality is an intimate fusion, lived, a way of seeing and a way of life, a way of being. And it does not seek exotic, esoteric, and grotesquely abstruse sources, nor is it the return of a paganism of uncertain origins. It is not, either, one of those “ready-to-use” or “one-use-only” concepts of which our time without a soul repays itself as victim of the eternal money-changers of the Temple. It is all the more attractive for never taking on the discourse of an artist. . . . It reads like a watermark for the initiate who is the only one who knows how to see, read, and decipher the message deliberately sown into his codes and signs.

In spring 2006, Lo took a different path at the Dak’Art Biennale of Contemporary African Art, for which he created a complex and moving installation in memory of Rosa Parks, who had died the previous fall.¹¹ “The Refusal of Rosa Parks” refers to the signal moment in 1955 when the then-young woman defied the segregation of public bussing

in Montgomery, Alabama. Lo's work consisted of banks of sepia-toned and black-and-white, photo-realist paintings of Parks and many other heroes of human rights struggles worldwide, including Amadou Bamba. The portraits were set in an environment framed by chains of bovine bones sliced into sections linked together with thick iron circlets. Lo created a similar effect in his haunting installation "The Bones of My Ancestors" at the Musée Dapper in 2006, that "echo[ed] the voices of those who have disappeared" in the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Falgayrettes-Leveau, 2006:17–20).

In the course of painting and then constructing his installation for Dak'Art, Lo had a revelation. As he explained to us in an interview (in his impeccable English) in summer, 2006,

The work I made for Rosa Parks was very important for me because she was the first Black woman who refused to give up her place to a White man, and I took this idea and wanted to make a major tribute to her. And then I thought of all the Rosa Parks in the world, [and] Sheikh Amadou Bamba, he is one of them . . . The work I want to do on Sheikh Amadou Bamba is really important for me, because when I was doing "The Refusal of Rosa Parks," I said to myself, "I have something more than Rosa Parks here in my own country." Bamba was deported to Gabon, but he escaped [death] every time. Now I wanted to consider those who were in the contemporary time of Sheikh Amadou Bamba, and all the things he endured, with the ship [of exile to Gabon], and with the bull [that Bamba miraculously escaped in a murderous colonial conspiracy], and now I am doing something like this to have ideas of how to represent all these things. It will be just like the Rosa Parks, a wall piece, different elements composing the work, paintings, sculptures, found objects. All will be in one room. I can represent all the family, all the caliphs and all the other saints . . . What interests me first—I didn't come to Sheikh Amadou Bamba like the others—what interests me first is Black people, all the Blacks who have given Blackness a good name . . . When you have something in front of you, you do not see it, you do not pay attention. But really, Rosa Parks made me aware of all the responsibilities that Sheikh Amadou Bamba has, she is the one who made me realize all the intentions of Bamba. Things are getting in order in my mind . . ."

"As I grow older, everything evolves, and now I see that Sheikh Amadou Bamba is very very important to me. I now see that Bamba's life is full of events, and I can take all these events to create images, but it's not easy, because you have to respect the image. You cannot do whatever you want with it. Slowly, slowly, I'll come to it, but I must pay attention not to degrade the image . . . How to show it is very important. Even with his portrait, one cannot do everything, you know. I imagine one day in New York, I want to [put it] on a big big building, on the side of a building, to make a huge portrait of Bamba . . . I want to have a portrait of Sheikh Amadou Bamba like *this* [he stretched his arms wide] . . . Speaking about Sheikh Amadou Bamba is to make [portraits of] Sheikh Amadou Bamba with other interesting persons like Gandhi and the Dalai Lama, they have relationships in the ways they are tolerant and what they've done . . . And talking about Black people, work like this is for us to do, we Black people, because if we don't do it no one will do it for us. This is our responsibility . . ."

"I am going to Paris soon, and now I have the idea of when I travel around the world I will tag, I will tag like the rappers do, I will put Sheikh Amadou Bamba's image in China, in South America. What interests me is placing it everywhere, because he is a very

impressive man. I want him to be everywhere. I am sure with time he will be everywhere. It is the responsibility of the artist to do this. I will make a stencil and in one minute I can do it, I can put the images everywhere, I will do it for myself and it is my responsibility to do this for everyone.

Conclusions

The ease with which Senegalese Sufis who are also contemporary artists navigate among global aspirations and local inspirations is mirrored in the interactions of universal principles of Islam and focused devotions. The tensions between such positions are part of the fabric of Mouride daily discourse and practice. Contemporary art works may be read at the superficial level of *zahir* as that which is evident to global audiences interested in contemporary art, or of a *batin* of deeper meaning available to those engaged in the profundities of mysticism. Ultimately, the Senegalese artists who have spoken to us here would be unlikely to find any contradiction between the *zahir* and *batin* of their oeuvres. Indeed, the work of such works includes reflection of just such meaningful dimensions and dialectics.

This said, it is also clear that Dakar has long been and remains a most cosmopolitan west African city (Simone, 2004), and modernism thrives in its arts. Many theorists challenge such terms as “cosmopolitan” and “modern,” of course, because of how fraught they are with Eurocentric arrogance and the cries and whispers of colonial, trans-colonial, and neo-colonial injustices. In their place, perspectives such as “discrepant cosmopolitanism” are proposed (Mercer, 2005:11). This debate is raging and may never end, but in the meantime, Senegalese contemporary artists like those encountered in the preceding pages are creating their own ways of being in the world through their expressive works. Most often, the paintings of Viyé Diba or the iron figures of Ndary Lo can be appreciated by expatriate art enthusiasts for their abstraction—as “discrepant” as it may be, following another, related line of recent reasoning (Mercer, 2006). A sculpture by the late Moustapha Dimé or Moussa Tine would stand out in a glass-walled villa in the Hollywood hills, whether or not anyone viewing it knew that it had been created by an artist from Senegal. Contemporary art can be just that, in other words. Yet whether or not those studying, exhibiting, critiquing, and purchasing such works grasp anything beyond the pleasures of color, texture, and tone, the *artists* may.

By no means are all contemporary artists in Senegal Mourides, although some who are not nevertheless express Mouride precepts through their work. And by no means are all artists who *are* Mourides given to expression of mysticism through their paintings, sculptures, weavings, or design. But some are, and through their *works*, we can reflect upon the dynamism of Islam in contemporary Senegal.

Notes

- 1 Our research on Senegalese visual culture began in 1994 and is ongoing. We are indebted to the inspiration of Sheikh Amadou Bamba and the encouragement of his late son and caliph, Serigne Salio Mbacké; we are also most grateful for the assistance of a host of

Senegalese friends, and especially the artists discussed in this paper, Ousmane Gueye and Cheikhou Camara. For detailed discussion, bibliography, explanation of funding, and acknowledgments, see Roberts and Roberts 2003. Translations from French to English are our responsibility.

- 2 The work of Yelimane Fall is discussed in Roberts and Roberts 2003.
- 3 See, among others, Grabski 2006 and forthcoming; and Harney 2004.
- 4 The following paragraphs about Moustapha Dimé, Moussa Tine, and Viyé Diba are adapted from Roberts and Roberts 2008a and *idem*, 2003; those concerning Ndary Lo are original to the present paper.
- 5 Dimé's former student Gabriel Malou has transformed the studio into an international artists' residence and film-screening venue; see <http://artsrightsjustice.net/group/mustafadimesenegal>.
- 6 On recycling in the Colobane junkyard, see A. Roberts 1996.
- 7 *Fana* is a mystical goal of Sufism, through which a person seeks to efface him- or herself into the Word of God; see Schimmel, 1975.
- 8 Harney, 2000, 80. Diba's recent work concerns the environmental degradation and gross consumerism that characterize contemporary Dakar; see Roberts 2010, 8.
- 9 See Bouttiaux 2009, 258; Mbaye 2004; Sankalé 2003.
- 10 Falgayrettes-Leveau 2002, 5; cf. Sankalé 2006, Sagna 2000: 39.
- 11 Wade 2006, 224–225; cf. Nelson 2006, M. N. Roberts 2006.

CHAPTER 30

Religion, Health, and the Economy

James R. Cochrane¹

Much has been written about African economies regarding colonization, decolonization, and, more recently, the traumas and tribulations of African states seeking to build diverse, modern, and sustainable economies capable of meeting the aspirations of their peoples. Studies of the formal economy are paralleled by others on the extensive, economically significant informal African markets that cross nation-state boundaries in surprising ways,² not to mention the murky world of illegal drugs, arms, gems, and other commodity smuggling markets.³

Within that shadow realm lies a shameful, hard to uncover trade in the human body—especially body parts,⁴ women, and children. Here the body is not, in the first instance, a representation or a social construct but material, concrete, and physical: hurt, abused, mutilated, or killed. And even if exchange relations are not specifically about the physical body, everything economic implicates the body: the material construction of the body through productive, reproductive and distributive mechanisms impacts on people and their lives. Poverty and inequality, whatever else, kill the body.⁵

Economics thus matters, as was well-understood by all the great social critics of the nineteenth century, of course, and earlier by Adam Smith and the Scottish Rationalists as they theorized the emerging forms of capitalism. Just as economic realities in Africa, including environmental ones, are fundamental to any assessment of the particular social and political conditions, so too is any religious response, concerned about the fate of persons, communities, and peoples, to those conditions.

One would thus expect scholars of religion in Africa to take account of these realities, either in their intermingling with particular religious practices and ideas, or because particular religious traditions contain strong ethical norms and values having to do with how, why, and under what conditions people live with each other in the household of the world (for example: Jubilee prescriptions in the Hebrew Bible; multiple pericopae about rich and poor in the Jesus tradition; the careful lessons about economic behavior in the Qur'an; or the notion of *ubuntu* in southern African communities that includes questions of ownership and distribution of communal goods). Exceptions

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aside, however, very few among the extensive writings by African scholars on religion ever consider economic reality directly.⁶

Perhaps this is not so surprising, given the history of African thought in the latter half of the twentieth century. Classical African intellectuals such as Franz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral focus a great deal on mentalities (alienation, in the case of Fanon)⁷ or norms and values (race, identity, nation building, leadership, and ethics in the case of Cabral).⁸ Other icons of the decolonization movement paid heavy attention to African identity and history, including African cultural characteristics, values, and esthetics (Léopold Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, Aimé Césaire, Marcus Garvey, Cheikh Anta Diop), an emphasis that continued later among scholars such as Ali Mazrui, Kwame Appiah, Steve Biko, Achille Mbembe. Of course, some of these figures (and others like Julius Nyerere) have had an interest in African socialism or, at least, in a critique of contemporary capitalism in its colonial and neo-colonial forms. But because religious inquiry centrally deals with symbols, images, rituals, performance, ideas, discourses, narratives, texts, sites, and the like—with mental, social, and cultural phenomena—it is more likely to take up African intellectual resources at these levels than at the point of economy.⁹

One could surmise that religious scholars unconsciously accede to the idea that economics is a “hard” social science describable in empirical and mathematical terms, hence, unsuited to “soft sciences” such as anthropology, sociology, or religious studies. Or that the vast complexities of modern economies, including the global political economy, simply overburden most scholars of religion. In fact, although some scholars have recently taken a more direct interest in the material economic dimensions of religion and the effect of religion on political economies,¹⁰ the potent effects of economic realities on the lives of Africans probably require something more to further illuminate religion in Africa especially in respect of those who act on religious grounds to structure the way they order or respond to economic life, and the way economic life structures their imagination, action, and behaviour. It seems clear that the task requires strong interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary skills, and no doubt there are multiple ways of approaching the analytical and synthetic research that still needs to be undertaken.

To provoke further reflection and research, let us consider one approach to the link between religion and economic life, via an expanded conception of the body and its health, as a lens on the political economy of societies. A focus on concepts of body and health is not entirely arbitrary for, as we shall see, it allows for an integrated theorization of religion and economy.

The Economy of the African Body

Among the most harrowing stories recorded in the second Carnegie study on poverty in South Africa synopsis published in 1989¹¹ (the first, in 1932, focused only on poor whites),¹² is that of the spouse of an unemployed Cape Town man who, on losing his job, left to seek work in Johannesburg. Initially receiving remittances from him she soon lost contact, then lost her job too, leaving her without income: “When your children cry hunger-crying,” she said, “your heart wants to break. It will be better if they were

dead . . . It's terrible when a mother wants to kill her own children. But . . . I'm not a mother worth having . . . You can also pray to God that he will keep you from killing your children."¹³ Similarly, Jessie Tamboer from the Eastern Cape, unable to afford education for her children or buy them food, could no longer stand it and decided to kill herself. She poured five litres of paraffin over her body and then held her soaking dress over some flames, thus escaping burning shame through fiery pain.¹⁴

How does one think about religion in the face of such realities? A profound existential and practical question, it is also a question of intellectual importance for understanding religion in Africa for at least two reasons, one moral, the other anthropological.

First, it introduces us to the horrors of poverty in the starkness of the choices contemplated by these mothers. Slavoj Žižek, analyzing the traumatic act in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* where the heroine Sethe kills her own child to avoid her recapture into slavery, refers to her act as an "ethical monstrosity," a horrific act nevertheless made ethical by Sethe's conclusion that this is "the only way open to her to act effectively as a parent, protect her children and save their dignity. . . ."¹⁵ Worth, shame, dignity, desperation—all are relevant here; each provokes a deeper analysis of the meaning of the sacred in the context of poverty, inequality or oppression. The woman's prayer in the first story, that God would constrain her actions, further signifies an experiential, if not yet reflective, foundation for pursuing that task.

Second, all these stories point to how the body is marked by events or, more generally, becomes a marker of its context. LeFleur notes that "bodies speak loudly about mentalities" in the way they are represented (semiotics of the body), conditioned (biological history and biochemistry), and manipulated (redesigning, re-engineering, even maiming the body).¹⁶ Representation, conditioning or manipulation of the body, however, is never simply a matter of thought, biology or *techné*. As a human body, it is always a relational body, hence, a social body. More than that, David Harvey reminds us, pointing to Marx's critique of capitalism, it is a material body whose integrity can be, and is frequently, violated, disfigured, subdued, maimed and destroyed by the workings of the economy.¹⁷

A consideration of the body is thus impossible without understanding both the human person whose body it is, and the nature of the society within which this person's body finds—or fails to find—its place.¹⁸ The body thus unites, in a dialectical relationship, both the question of human dignity (the root of human freedom) and the nature of the human household (the political economy of the body). Thus the inability of these mothers to protect the dignity and freedom of their children or themselves in the face of the radical material reduction of their lives leads to despair or anomie, when the death of the body no longer matters. The dialectic of the body thus forces upon us the question of ends: the human being as an end in her- or himself, and the wellbeing of persons as the end of society.¹⁹

There is an African way of talking about this too. Consider the young woman from a rural area who, with the help of a faith-inspired HIV and AIDS active organization called "Masangane" ("let us embrace"),²⁰ had acknowledged her positive status and entered an anti-retroviral treatment programme. Regaining health and vitality, she became "beautiful again" and, returning to her second township home in Soweto, experienced people coming out of their houses to see the "miracle" of her regained life, a "person risen from the dead" as they saw it. This Masangane workers call "the

resurrection effect.”²¹ Yet consider the nuances in this story. This woman returns “home” to the city from another, rural, “home.” Not just a body in one place, she is mobile, geographically located in an oscillating pattern of migration between the rural and urban—or the local and global—that characterizes African political economies generally in the search for work or income that is hard to come by otherwise. The two disparate locations, each in itself layered with inequalities, also signify generalized geographies of inequity. Her body is marked by a deadly dance between privilege and privation in the gap between the employed and the unemployed, the affluent and the discarded, those with access and those without.

Another nuance: consider the people around her. Her victory was their victory. She was a cipher for other bodies they know, conceivably their own. More accurately, then, we should speak of bodies as relationally inscribed. The threat to her body, the joy at her return to “beauty,” are simultaneously signifiers of threats to and triumphs of a communal body, a social body.

Here the Sesotho concept of *bophelo* (*impilo* in isiXhosa, *ubumi* in Bemba, with many parallels in other African languages) helps. Incorporating both the idea of comprehensive wellbeing (health writ large) and religion (the presence of and participation in the sacred), it ontologically unites the individual self, the family, the homestead, the community, the nation, the ancestors, and the earth in one comprehensive framework.²² Health (or lack of it) in any one sphere depends upon the health of the other spheres. The body, in this context, is not atomized or isolated, but always represents a complex relationship of the individual person to the hearth, the family, community, society, the living dead, other creatures, and the earth. Extrapolating, the health of the body is thus inextricably bound up with the economy, affected by the presence or absence of goods and services, by processes of production and reproduction, by available resources and the health of the environment. The pertinent question is how we might understand religion in relation to such a conceptualization of the body; it surely must find multiple and diverse expressions in various religions rooted in Africa—or raise the question of what we mean by religion in this regard.

Let me use this idea of the body then to trace four theoretical fields of inquiry, all pertinent to the way in which economies in Africa (and elsewhere) are constructed, and all of potential relevance to the study of religion in Africa. I shall name them “home bodies,” “moving bodies,” “desiring bodies,” and “healthy bodies.”

Home Bodies: Patterns of Production and Reproduction

The notion of *bophelo* (and equivalents) locates persons and their particular bodies in a space described by the idea of a home. What makes a home? It is a “familiar” space, a space of and for family, where one feels “at home.” This seems to tie the idea of home to biological or kinship relations, drawing a boundary between those who belong and those who do not. The boundary then inscribes two other kinds of relationships: first, to other homes to create a broadened “familiar” space now including village, clan, tribe, or nation; second, to others alien to the village or the nation, who represent the stranger.

Within this complex representation of relationships and boundaries lie the patterns of social organization that define productive and reproductive activities, the territory

of classical analyses of the political economy represented by figures such as Adam Smith and Karl Marx. But other patterns are also present, of inclusion and exclusion, hospitality and hostility, often governed by material economic interests or threats. In this context religious bodies and constructs often play an ambiguous role that needs analysis. Just as it pays to understand Luther's reformation in the context of Rome's economic exploitation of Germany at the time, when *gravamina* or writings of complaint made possible by Gutenberg's invention of the printing press were flooding cities and towns and fueling an increasingly virulent, proto-nationalist protest movement among merchants and townsfolk, so too it pays to understand the dynamics of the market and globalization in relation to religious impulses and movements in African communities or societies.²³

Returning to the idea of home-place, let us consider another African term, this time expressed in isiXhosa through the word *ikhaya*. Whereas *impilo* (isiXhosa for *bophelo*) addresses a field of vitality, *ikhaya* is the physical home in its fullness, a complex web of life consisting of the dwelling, its hearth, the extended family, its dead, the ground in which they are buried, the earth that is cultivated, and the animals that live with them, all bound (*religio*) by the sacred. We see here a close parallel to the original Greek *oikos* ("household"), from which comes the term "economy" (*oikos* plus *nomos*: the regulation of the household).

Vuyani Vellum, in his study of a township near Stellenbosch, South Africa, explores African traditional understandings of sacred home-place, of *ikhaya*.²⁴ The township, created to house migrant workers from the Eastern Cape, was part of the grand apartheid plan of controlling black labour. It was named Khayamandi ("Khaya—" means "home"), a typical apartheid era twist of language. Many of its original inhabitants had been there almost fifty years, settling into meager houses, gradually establishing themselves for eleven months of the year (the labour contract period, another form of control), some able to bring their families at the outset, others only after apartheid was dismantled. Vellum shows that fifty years of life in Khayamandi still did not make the township house a lived *ikhaya*. Too much was missing, not least the land in which ancestors were buried, cattle that stood as guarantor of wellbeing, and the sacred hearth that marked the distant "kraal" in the Eastern Cape as their true "home." Seen in terms of a lack in one's *impilo*, life in the township meant quite directly, a lack of the full set of conditions that generate wellbeing. Back in the "true home" of these migrant workers, the rest of the family, women especially, are both the recipient of remittances—though not always reliably—and the producers of goods to keep the local family alive, even if only at subsistence level.

Both sites of the body are in various ways broken in the process, and the home-place fragmented, shattered or, sometimes, destroyed. This shows on the marks inscribed on the bodies of the persons themselves. Patterns of production and reproduction are inevitably transformed in the process, with multiple effects on the people concerned, including a reshaping of gendered patterns of relationship.

The intense religiosity of black South Africans should, under such conditions, not be a surprise. Equally, we would expect new forms of religion to emerge that are capable of dealing with these changed and continually changing conditions. From this point of view, the rapid rise of African Independent (Initiated, Instituted) Churches,

particularly those generally classified as Zionist, must be seen in relation to the political economy within which they arise, and their forms of belief and behaviour as expressive of an attempt to cope with, even transcend, their conditions.²⁵

Moving Bodies: Transnational Religion and Migration

Khayamandi usefully introduces another dynamic of increasing relevance for the study of religion in Africa, that of bodies on the move. Mobility is a characteristic, perhaps defining, dimension of the life of an increasing number of people. As Baumann argues in his Gifford Lectures, the extent to which and the way one is mobile may mark a critical division between people under conditions of contemporary globalization—those that are included and excluded, with the excluded regularly seeking to be included, sometimes desperately.²⁶ Some are mobile because they are beneficiaries of globalization (business people, academics, politicians, tourists), some because they are not beneficiaries but understand the costs of exclusion.

Scholars who look at these dynamics in relation to religion in Africa and elsewhere thus speak of “transnational religion,” carried by a growing number of people who cross national and other borders, driven by political, economic, and technological imperatives, and enhanced by new communication and transportation technologies that increasingly compress time and space. The people who move do so not only as bodies moving from one place to another; they bring with them their religious ideas and practices as well. The pattern of migration is not about leaving one home, severing ties, and building a new one elsewhere, but about regular oscillation in which not only remittances and goods but also ideas, rituals, practices, and institutional arrangements flow back and forth from receiving and sending places. Both receiving and the sending places are altered in the process, as are the religious expressions of migrants, in a continual shift to fit circumstances. “The institutional connections that migration engenders, and that reinforce and are reinforced by already-global aspects of religious life,” notes Levitt, “transform religion into a powerful, under-explored site of transnational belonging.”²⁷

Explorations of this dynamic in Africa have begun, some focusing on “how religious languages, filiations and imaginings structure the way migrants make themselves ‘at home’ in South Africa, whether on a longer or a more temporary basis.”²⁸ They include studies of migrants in Johannesburg and Cape Town who, not seeking permanent residence, locate themselves in “a transnational network constituted by kinship ties, ethnicity, or by religious imaginings and solidarities.”²⁹ This is not a sedentary religious phenomenon, bound over time and in space to one village, congregation, or country; it occupies a terrain that is explicitly and continually shifting as people move. It may also connect to religious movements that are themselves transnational, as with Somalis in Johannesburg inspired and supported by the Tablighi Jama`at, a powerful Islamic missionary movement spanning continents aiming to “reislamize” Muslims in their new context of immigration.³⁰

The religiously inspired Frafras migrants in Accra, Ghana are another example, situated in the city slum called Nima, an environment marginal both to traditional and

modern society. Observing their interactions, Hart sees a diverse body of people engaging in an almost bewildering range of exchanges and other activities, a mixture of what he calls a “Dickensian mob” and “the communal spirit of hill tribesmen whose fathers were earth priests and who expected to end their days as custodians of ancestral shrines.” In a marginal economic situation filled with religious fervour, it is, he says, “as if the economy was being made, unmade and remade from day to day.”³¹

Desiring Bodies: Consumption and Commodification

Patterns of transnationalization, of course, are the stuff of a globalizing economic order, though what exactly constitutes globalization remains imprecise and here is not the place to analyze that.³² But one aspect is worth considering: the extent to which consumption and commodification, under contemporary conditions, mark not only the nature of the market but also the shape society more broadly, including religion.

From a philosophical perspective, informed by psychoanalytic theory, consumption and commodification can be understood as desire: Žižek, for example, defines Coca-Cola as an object of desire in “the link between the capitalist dynamics of surplus-value and the libidinal dynamics of surplus-enjoyment.”³³ Consumption is driven by desire (for goods or services) and fuelled by the manipulation of desire (marketing). But what, when that which mediates desire becomes an end in itself, when surplus-enjoyment becomes *itself* the cause of desire? Then particular commodities never satisfy the desire. They leave a void even as they promise to fill it. The more one has the more one wants, and the more one feels a lack of that which is desired, the greater the craving for it. This exaltation of desire as a primary principle of the consumer economy produces what the Comaroffs call “millennial capitalism:”³⁴ it promises “instant riches and gratifications through a wealth of commodities and images of a successful life,” while the market “itself becomes a mythologised and entirely mystifying and non-transparent mechanism of complex exchange relations.”³⁵

Yearnings for inclusion into a globalized circulation of desire and commodities can and do take religious forms. One way of understanding flourishing religious movements in our time, then, is to probe how they “promise inclusion into something larger, more universal, more contemporary and powerful than what local religious institutions can deliver.”³⁶ Impoverishment, which marginalizes or isolates one from the global circulation of commodities, creating an inability to purchase the projections of desire that fill the media and the markets, is thus a practical barrier to desire. And a reason to turn to religious forms of life that promises some escape from marginalization or isolation. The desiring body is thus open to religious experiences and practices that might promise fulfillment of its desire. Jeannerat believes this explains why Pentecostals, in their focus on bodily and experiential religion, are so successful among migrants.³⁷

The pursuit of consumer goods for the sake of the pursuit, in order to fill the unfilled void, is a kind of fetishism of the object of desire that has its parallel in the fetishism of money. Marx originally meant by that, in part, that money creates an illusion of value in and of itself, becoming the object of desire by virtue of its representation of something else (the goods for which money is a means of exchange). With the rising power of financial capitalism, this illusory nature of money has become a dominant

feature of the global economy, so much so that financial instruments can be created that have no reality other than a virtual one, no material base anywhere, resting only on such intangible things as ratings, hedges, credit-swaps, and futures—all of which can disappear in an instant, with severe material consequences, as we saw in the 2008 collapse of the financial markets. No ordinary person can grasp this mysterious kind of exchange. It is no surprise, then, that one will find phenomena that live off the fetish of money, transposed into religious idiom, when the promise of money is distant and its reality scarce, for religion is good at projecting desire.

Smith, in a recent article, thus examines what he calls the “possessed body,” via the curious case of spirit possession among female students of a primary school in the Taita/Taveta District of Kenya.³⁸ His explanation of the nature of this possession draws a structural correspondence between spirit familiars (*majini*) and local conceptions of money, shaped by the pressures of trying to enter urban labour markets or engage in cash crop production. This was at the time of the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes into the Kenyan economy, following the neo-liberal economic policies of the IMF known as the Washington Consensus, which dislocated local economic strategies of survival. The role of the *majini* has roots in a long discontent with late colonial and post-colonial Taita society, but in this new context, Smith suggests, *majini* “assume the characteristics imputed to commodities and commercial exchange, and are themselves a foreign commodity whose existence in Taita is facilitated by money and travel beyond the hills.”³⁹ The spirit familiars “are in effect symbolic of money itself, not only in that they appear to create wealth ex nihilo, but also because, like money, they effect the conversion of capital goods (labor, cattle, and crops) into consumption goods (sugar, tea, minivans, and more money).”⁴⁰

All of these examples suggest fruitful directions of enquiry about religion in Africa in relation to consumption and commodification, whether in the material conditions and effects on the body of market economies (“formal,” “informal,” and “illegal” markets), or in their ideational or “spiritual” qualities (including lack, desire, possession, and the promise of the fetish).

Healthy Bodies: Capabilities and the Social Determinants of Health

The body, we have said, is more than simply individual or personal, but relational with respect to others, including the living dead who are part of the narrative structure of the life of the self, and of the earth itself. Health, we have noted, is then understood as comprehensive wellbeing, of the self in the whole. An individual’s health is tied to the health of the family, its health to that of the village, and the village’s to the quality of its water and land. Such an ecology of health is incomprehensible apart from the conditions that promote or hinder health. Expressed in contemporary public health language, we would speak of the social and environmental determinants of health as fundamental points of reference for effective and sustainable interventions in the health of populations. Among the most critical of the social determinants is socio-economic status (SES).

SES is an econometric measure; but it is also an indicator of the general wellbeing of a person or household, and includes not only material indicators but social ones too (e.g. education). It gives us some clue about the extent to which a person’s capacities

or capabilities have been developed so that they are able to not only survive but also flourish. To consider what one means by human capacities and capabilities thus becomes an important question in economic theory, and it has guided the work of Nobel laureate, Amartya Sen, in his understanding of development as freedom.⁴¹ Whereas freedom here is related to the Kantian moral imperative—the capacity to act freely in such a way as to guarantee the same freedom for all—it is not to be understood (either in Kant or Sen) as a disembodied capacity, separate from the body or material reality. Freedom is not guaranteed. It is constrained by a limitation on the capacity to act in the world. It is enhanced by paying attention to the full range of capabilities necessary for properly human action, appropriate to the dignity of the human being. This, in Nussbaum's view, includes emotional, social, and spiritual capabilities, not only physiological or biological ones.⁴² The contrary idea of freedom which emphasizes the right of an individual to enter into exchange relations through the exercise of rational choices, "rationally" calculating the costs and benefits of any putative exchange, reflects a highly truncated and reductionist anthropology drawn from the market theory.

Why note this? Because it draws into both our conception of the health of the body in the African economy, and the idea of health as comprehensive wellbeing, a richer, more nuanced perspective on what the body needs to thrive. Where we observe any depletion of human capabilities, a thwarting of the potential of the human being to act and to act freely, we should expect a wide range of religious phenomena that give expression to that experience of deprivation, to the impulses that seek to counter deprivation by opening up new avenues for flourishing, and to the celebration of that hope in rituals of various kinds.

This is particularly apparent in the importance of healing in African religious traditions which, well understood, almost always exceeds the condition of a particular body or person to incorporate the community and the cosmos. Healthy bodies are signs of blessing or religious favour, of the impulse to life in the face of much that threatens it. This is one way of recognizing why and how healing is not only an expression of faith or a tradition but equally a central mark of self-understanding in African traditional religions, African Christianities (e.g., the African Independent Churches, or for much longer, the Coptic Church), Islam in its basic doctrines, and other less prominent religious traditions of Africa. All invoke not merely healing of the body but of relationships and of the spirit, however variously defined. A prominent feature of African life, the entities—individual, communal, and corporate—that embody this in the economy of health in African societies make up a very large proportion of the formal and informal health structures of most African nations.⁴³ Health as a lens on the religious body thus provides not only a potent entry point for understanding the character and condition of a society, including its economy, but it illuminates the economy of the sacred as well.

Notes

- 1 This essay was made possible by grants from the National Research Foundation of South Africa and the University of Cape Town Research Committee, to whom I express thanks, though I alone bear responsibility for its contents.

- 2 Manthia Diawara, "Toward a Regional Imaginary in Africa," in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Frederick Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).
- 3 Misha Glenny, *McMafia: A Journey Through the Global Criminal Underworld* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2008).
- 4 Trevor Harrison, "Globalization and the Trade in Human Body Parts," *Canadian Review of Sociology & Anthropology* 36, no. 1 (1999), Nancy Scheper-Hughes, "Bodies for Sale—Whole or in Parts," *Body & Society* 7, no. 2–3, Stephen Wilkinson, *Bodies for Sale: Ethics and Exploitation in the Human Body Trade* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
- 5 The correlation between illness, disease, and death on the one hand, and poverty and inequality on the other is well known; see for example, Paul Farmer, *Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plagues* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California, 1999), Lucy Gilson et al., "Challenging Inequity through Health Systems," (Geneva: WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health, 2007), Jim Yong Kim et al., eds, *Dying for Growth: Global Inequality and the Health of the Poor* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2000), Nancy Krieger, "Why Epidemiologists Cannot Afford to Ignore Poverty," *Epidemiology* 18 (2007), Graham Scambler and Paul Higgs, "Stratification, Class and Health: Class Relations and Health Inequalities in High Modernity," *Sociology* 33, no. 2 (1999), Eileen Stillwaggon, *AIDS and the Ecology of Poverty* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). For some diseases, such as malaria, the picture is more complex with regard to socio-economic status; see, for example, Kwame Boadu, "Social Class and Health Status in Ghana," *Current Sociology* 50, no. 4 (2002).
- 6 A particularly thorough recent example of a work that does so, from within a broad Christian paradigm, is Klaus Nürnberger, *Prosperity, Poverty and Pollution: Managing the Approaching Crisis* (London: Zed Books, 1999). See also the Center for the Study of Religion and Culture (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csrrc/rep.html>) which has an interest in the interplay between religion and economy.
- 7 See Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2003).
- 8 See Carlos Lopes, ed., *Africa's Contemporary Challenges: The Legacy of Amílcar Cabral* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
- 9 So, citing a small random sample, Ifi Amadiume, *Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture* (London: Zed Books, 1997), tackles gendered realities, David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1996), explores the shaping of comparative religious theories via the dynamics of colonial conquest and containment, Jean-Marc Éla, *My Faith as an African* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), discusses ancestors, missions, popular resistance, conflict and independence, John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Press, 1970), deals with African philosophy in relation to knowledge and culture, Peter Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), with morality, virtue, and ethics.
- 10 To cite a random sample again, see A.B.T. Byaruhanga-Akiiki, "African Traditional Values for Human Development," in *Church Contribution to Integral Development*, ed. Agbasiere J.T. and Zabajungu B.K. (Eldoret: Gaba Publications, 1989), Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Second Comings: Neoprotestant Ethics and Millennial Capitalism in South Africa, and Elsewhere," in *2000 Years and Beyond: Faith, Identity, and the Common Era*, ed. Paul Gifford (London: Routledge, 2002) (reprinted as chapter 3 in this volume), John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes

- from the South African Postcolony," *American Ethnologist* 26, no. 3 (1999), Barbara Frank, "Permitted and Prohibited Wealth: Commodity-Possessing Spirits, Economic Morals, and the Goddess Mami Wata in West Africa," *Ethnology* 34 (1995), Peter Geschiere, "Local Knowledge and Imported Knowledge—Witchcraft, Healing and New Forms of Accumulation," in *Staat und Gesellschaft in Afrika: Erosions- und Reformprozesse*, ed. Peter Meyns (Hamburg: Lit Verlag, 1996), Paul Gifford, "Christian Fundamentalism and Development," *Review of African Political Economy* 52 (1991), Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), Rosalind I. J. Hackett, "The Gospel of Prosperity in West Africa," in *Religion and the Transformations of Capitalism: Comparative Approaches*, ed. Richard H. Roberts (London: Routledge, 1995), Colin Murray, "The Work of Men, Women and the Ancestors: Social Reproduction in the Periphery of Southern Africa," in *The Social Anthropology of Work*, ed. Sandra Wallman (New York: Academic Press, 1979), Karla Poewe, *Religion, Kinship and Economy in Luapula, Zambia* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), Parker Shipton, *Bitter Money: Cultural Economy and Some African Meanings of Forbidden Commodities*, *American Ethnological Society Monograph* 1 (Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1989), Parker Shipton, "Debts and Trespasses: Land, Mortgages, and the Ancestors in Western Kenya," *Africa, Journal of the International African Institute* 62, no. 3 (1992), Amy Stambach, "Evangelism and Consumer Culture in Northern Tanzania," *Anthropological Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (2000). The Berkley Center and Department of Anthropology at Georgetown University have also had a recent interest in the "anthropology of religion, money and economy."
- 11 Francis Wilson and Mamphela Ramphele, *Uprooting Poverty: The South African Challenge, Report for the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1989).
 - 12 Report of the Carnegie Commission, "The Poor White Problem in South Africa," (Stellenbosch: 1932).
 - 13 Wilson and Ramphele, *Uprooting Poverty: The South African Challenge*, 97.
 - 14 Ibid., 157.
 - 15 Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute – or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000), 153.
 - 16 William R. LaFleur, "Body," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 36.
 - 17 David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 108.
 - 18 Examples of body-in-society studies include Jack L. Amariglio, "The Body, Economic Discourse, and Power: An Economist's Introduction to Foucault," *History of Political Economy* 20 (1988), Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A.M. Smith (New York: Vintage, 1975), Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), John H. Simpson, "Religion and the Body: Sociological Themes and Prospects," in *A Future for Religion? New Paradigms for Social Analysis*, ed. William H. Swatos (London: Sage, 1993), Bryan S. Turner, *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory*, 3rd Revised ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2008).
 - 19 These two issues unite the most influential modern European ethical theory of Immanuel Kant, and the most widespread African conception of the person as human through other persons (often called the ethic of *ubuntu*). Kant's most fundamental maxim, that

- human freedom rests on acting towards humanity, whether in one's own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means (towards one's own inclinations, purposes or interests) but always at the same time as an end (the meaning of dignity), requires that one respect other persons not only for and in themselves, but because without this there is no possible respect for oneself (see Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of a Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 38). Freedom is thus bound to relationality. African conceptions of *ubuntu* (or equivalents) further emphasize the relational dimension, but never at the cost of human dignity or freedom.
- 20 Liz Thomas et al., "'Let Us Embrace': Role and Significance of an Integrated Faith-Based Initiative for HIV and Aids: Masangane Case Study" (Cape Town: African Religious Health Assets Programme, University of Cape Town, 2006).
 - 21 This story, and the analysis of it, comes from James R. Cochrane, "Of Bodies, Barriers, Boundaries and Bridges: Ecclesial Practice in the Face of HIV and AIDS," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 126 (2006).
 - 22 Paul Germond and Sepetla Molapo, "In Search of *Bophelo* in a Time of AIDS: Seeking a Coherence of Economies of Health and Economies of Salvation," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 126 (2006), Kathryn Linn Geurts, *Culture and the Senses: Bodily Ways of Knowing in an African Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
 - 23 An interesting analysis of religious tracts in Africa along compatible lines has been done by Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, "Religion and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 2 (1998).
 - 24 Vuyani Vellum, "The Quest for *Ikhaya*: The Use of the African Concept of Home in Public Life" (Masters Dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2002).
 - 25 See, for example, James Kiernan, *The Production and Management of Therapeutic Power in Zionism within a Zulu City* (Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen, 1990).
 - 26 Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).
 - 27 Peggy Levitt, "Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging: The Institutional Character of Transnational Religious Life," *Sociology of Religion* 65, no. 1 (2004): 14. See also James R. Cochrane, "Sacred Crossings: Movement, Migration and the Fate of the Religious Body," in *Broken Bodies and Healing Communities: The Challenge of HIV and AIDS in the South African Context*, ed. Neville Richardson (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2009).
 - 28 Thomas Blom Hansen, Caroline Jeannerat, and Samadia Sadouni, "Introduction: Portable Spirits and Itinerant People: Religion and Migration in South Africa in a Comparative Perspective," *African Studies* 68, no. 2 (2009): 191.
 - 29 Ibid.: 190.
 - 30 Samadia Sadouni, "'God Is Not Unemployed': Journeys of Somali Refugees in Johannesburg," *African Studies* 68, no. 2 (2009): 241.
 - 31 Keith Hart, "Kinship, Contract, and Trust: The Economic Organization of Migrants in an African City Slum," in *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, ed. Diego Gambetta (Oxford: Department of Sociology, University of Oxford, 2000), 177.
 - 32 See, for example, Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), Michael Chossudovsky, *The Globalisation of Poverty: Impacts of IMF and World Bank* (London: Zed Books and Third World Networks, 1997), Felix Moses Edoho, *Globalization and the New World Order: Promises, Problems, and Prospects for Africa in the*

- Twenty-First Century* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1997), Geoffrey Garrett, "The Causes of Globalization," *Comparative Political Studies* 33, no. 6–7 (2000), Ankie M. M. Hoogvelt, *Globalisation and the Postcolonial World: The New Political Economy of Development* (London: Macmillan, 1997), George Klay Kieh, Jr., ed., *Africa and the New Globalization* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008), Joseph Mensah, ed., *Neoliberalism and Globalization in Africa: Contestations from the Embattled Continent* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), Susanne Soederberg, Georg Menz, and Philip G. Cerny, eds., *Internalizing Globalization: The Rise of Neoliberalism and the Decline of National Varieties of Capitalism* (Basingstoke UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
- 33 Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 21–22.
- 34 Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming," *Public Culture* 12, no. 2 (2000), Comaroff and Comaroff, "Second Comings: Neoprotestant Ethics and Millennial Capitalism in South Africa, and Elsewhere."
- 35 Hansen, Jeannerat, and Sadouni, "Introduction: Portable Spirits and Itinerant People: Religion and Migration in South Africa in a Comparative Perspective," 192.
- 36 Ibid.: 192–3.
- 37 Caroline Jeannerat, "Of Lizards, Misfortune and Deliverance: Pentecostal Soteriology in the Life of a Migrant," *African Studies* 68, no. 2 (2009): 267. For similar arguments regarding the body in Charismatic Christianity, both in Africa and elsewhere, see Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 38 James H. Smith, "Of Spirit Possession and Structural Adjustment Programs: Government Downsizing, Education and Their Enchantments in Neo-Liberal Kenya," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 31, no. 4 (2001): 427. For a study of a related kind around witchcraft, see Comaroff and Comaroff, "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony."
- 39 Smith, "Of Spirit Possession and Structural Adjustment Programs: Government Downsizing, Education and Their Enchantments in Neo-Liberal Kenya," 430–31.
- 40 Ibid.: 434.
- 41 Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Random House, 1999).
- 42 Martha C. Nussbaum, "Human Capabilities, Female Human Beings," in *Women, Culture and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*, ed. Martha C. Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), Martha C. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 43 See, for example, African Religious Health Assets Programme, "Appreciating Assets: The Contribution of Religion to Universal Access in Africa" (Cape Town: ARHAP, Report for the World Health Organization, 2006), Olagoke Akintola, "Unpaid HIV/AIDS Care in Southern Africa: Forms, Context, and Implications," *Feminist Economics* 14, no. 4 (2008), Geoff Foster, "Study of the Response by Faith-Based Organizations to Orphans and Vulnerable Children: Preliminary Summary Report" (World Conference of Religions for Peace; United Nations Children Fund—UNICEF, 2003), B. Schmid et al., "The Contribution of Faith Based Organisations and Networks to Health in Sub-Saharan Africa" (Cape Town: African Religious Health Assets Programme, Study commissioned by B & M Gates Foundation, 2008).

CHAPTER 31

Religion, Illness, and Healing

David Westerlund

In his classical book on Nuer religion, Edward Evans-Pritchard maintained that “the test of what is the predominant motif in a religion is usually, or perhaps always, to what a people attribute dangers, illness and other misfortunes and what steps are taken to avoid or eliminate them.”¹ As a rule, there are strong connections between, on the one hand, illness conceptions and healing practices and, on the other hand, African indigenous religions. However, there are great varieties, and among some peoples, afflictions may be believed to be due mainly to natural or physical rather than religious or spiritual causes. In particular, this non-religious tendency may be exemplified by traditionally pastoralist ethnic groups, such as the Maasai and Turkana of East Africa.² This is an important reminder that the “secular” is not an exclusively western and modern phenomenon.³

Sometimes, a distinction is made between illness, the personally experienced state of being sick, and disease, the specialist diagnosis of sickness, as well as between healing (of illness) and curing (of disease). In those senses, illness may or may not coincide with disease. Apparently, however, these distinctions are usually etic or outsider categories rather than emic or indigenous ones. In this essay, I will not apply them but use illness and disease—or, for instance, sickness and malady—as well as healing and curing—respectively, as synonymous terms.

Introduction

Religious interpretations of illness and healing presuppose some kind of belief that humans in various ways are influenced by or dependent on certain spiritual or supra-human beings or powers. These beings or powers may or may not be conceived of in personalistic terms. In addition to the religious and natural ways of understanding illness and healing, there is an important human or socio-religious dimension too. In

Africa, relations between living human beings frequently entail an extraordinary or supranormal component. Among many peoples, so-called witches and sorcerers are common causes of sickness. Curses as well as blessings of certain human beings may also be seen as a powerful means of affecting the health of others.⁴

An etic or scholarly categorization of illness and healing in spiritual, human, and natural kinds may correspond to emic or indigenous conceptual categories. This can be exemplified by a traditional classification among the Cokwe people in Central Africa. According to this, diseases have three main causes: (1) displeased ancestors (*yikola ya mahamla*), (2) sorcery (*yikola ya cilowa*) and (3) events in the natural world (*yikola ya Nzambi*, literally “afflictions of God”). When the “ultimate” reason for an affliction is conceived of in terms of religion (spirits of ancestors) or social conflicts (sorcery), there is some herbal or bio-medical treatment of the “immediate” cause in order to relieve symptoms. However, the ultimate cause must be dealt with as well.⁵

This exemplifies the important observation that there is seldom a clear dichotomy between religious and non-religious understandings of disease and curing. Thus, spiritual and human or socio-religious explanations and ways of treatment often overlap with natural or physical ones. Particularly in cases of serious or even incurable afflictions, there is frequently an idea of an ultimate cause beyond a more easily or directly observable natural one. In addition to questions of “how,” there may thus also be questions such as “why now” and “why me,” which can lead beyond the issue of which human being is responsible and involve spiritual beings such as ancestors or deities.

In scholarly works on sickness and healing in indigenous African cultures, this markedly holistic character has often been obscured due to the various, limited, specializations of different scholars. While scholars of medicine have concentrated largely on, for instance, the use of herbs and investigations of their efficacy, and anthropologists have focused a great deal on sociological implications of blame-fixing for illness or other types of misfortune, scholars of religion have had a tendency to emphasize the religious aspects. Considering the multi-dimensional character of health issues, few if any fields of research are better suited for multi- and interdisciplinary research cooperation.

It appears that, in Africa as well as in the west and elsewhere, there is a growing awareness of the desirability or need for such cooperation. What is now often called integrative medicine, which refers to the integration of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), into conventional or bio-medically dominated modern health systems, is becoming increasingly significant, even though it is controversial and sometimes hotly debated. Terms such as alternative, complementary, and integrative medicine are not neutral but coined from the perspective of a predominantly bio-medical paradigm. In the west, it is mainly “alternatives” of Asian origin, like acupuncture, ayurveda, and mindfulness, that have gained ground, while in Africa, serious attempts are made in several places to make use of indigenous African insights and practices in modern health care settings.

If usually in altered forms, indigenous disease etiologies and ways of healing can also survive within new religious contexts. In particular, the confronting of spiritual beings or witches can be essential parts of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity as well as of Sufi Islam. An interesting example is the work of the Pentecostal pastor Helen

Ukpabio of the Liberty Gospel Church in Nigeria, who claims to have been a witch herself and to have the knowledge and power needed to confront witches in the name of the Holy Spirit. Even ordinary women can be empowered born-again Christians by joining the church, and thus resist the evil-doing power of witches.⁶

Examples

Given the importance of historical and cultural contextualization of illness and healing, as well as of the study of religions in general, I will limit the following accounts mainly to two examples, the San of southern Africa and the Sukuma in East Africa.⁷ Traditionally, the former have lived as hunters and gatherers, while the latter have been agriculturalists. To some extent a traditional way of life is still practiced among these peoples. Whereas the San are nowadays found primarily in Namibia and Botswana, the Sukuma live in northern Tanzania. As among other ethnic groups, there is a great diversity in terms of culture and religion among these peoples. For reasons of space, however, the following accounts will concentrate more on basically common features than on the varieties between various sub-groups and individuals.

There are still some hunter-gatherers among the San, although these are becoming increasingly rare. Others mix, for instance, farming and herding activities with the, mainly male, hunting and the, primarily female, gathering. Traditionally, the San have lived in small groups of some tens of people, which in the ethnographic literature have usually been called bands. Social relations, including those between men and women, have frequently been described as egalitarian. Two particularly well-known sub-groups of San are the more traditionally oriented Kung, who are found in north-eastern Namibia as well as in western Botswana, and the more acculturated Nharo of Botswana.⁸

The Sukuma are a Bantu-speaking people. They have a reputation of being conservative, and only a minority of them have converted to Christianity and Islam. In recent times, the significance of cattle-keeping has increased considerably. Therefore, they are nowadays often referred to as agro-pastoralists, although animal husbandry is not very important to their religion. Kinsfolk, who may not marry each other, can be spread over wide areas, while in general small neighborhoods or villages are significant social units. Traditionally, the Sukuma society had a gerontocratic structure, and even after the introduction of chieftainship, possibly more than 300 years ago, elders and neighbourhood headmen continued to play crucial leadership roles. Chiefs came as strangers, and their rule did not become autocratic, although their power was strengthened during the period of British colonial "indirect rule." In 1963, the new independent government of Tanganyika abolished chieftainships in the country.⁹

In the religious universe of the San there are two divine beings, God the creator, who has many names, for instance Gangwanana, which refers to God's greatness, and a lower deity, usually called Gauwa. God is seen as morally good and helpful, but may have some destructive features too. The lower deity is more clearly two-sided, but more evil than good. Sometimes, or among some individuals, these two divinities are seen as two aspects of the same divine being. A few people, who have been influenced by

Christian thinking, may even identify Gauwa with Satan. However, although the two divinities are close to each other, the majority conceive of them as two separate spiritual beings.¹⁰

A third category of religious powers are the spirits of the dead. These are immortal and closely associated with Gauwa. Unlike spirits of ancestors or “living dead” among the Sukuma and other peoples where the veneration of ancestors has a central position, the San spirits of the dead are not seen as identifiable persons but as “foreign” spiritual beings, and they are not objects of regular cult activities. God the creator, the lower deity, as well as the spirits of the dead are all associated with the sky, and may thus be called heavenly beings. A disease caused by these beings can manifest itself in grave internal ailments or exist in a living human being without that person being aware of it. By contrast, mild and localized ailments, visible on the surface of the body, common aches, and minor injuries are usually not associated with the spiritual beings in heaven.

Above all, it is in a therapeutic dance with many “shamanic” features, which has preventive as well as curative purposes, that the San ideas of illness and healing as religious issues are expressed. This dance has been described in old rock paintings and many other sources from different periods of time. Written accounts from the twentieth century onwards bear out a remarkable continuity and similarity of the performance and religious contents.

Women who participate in a therapeutic dance usually sit around a fire, sing, and clap their hands, while men dance around their circle with a gradually increased degree of intensity. After a while, some of them begin to shake and fall into trance. In that state, they may walk through the fire or pick up glowing pieces from it. They are now prepared to start treating the sick. Although there has been a tendency towards professionalization in some areas, healers do not normally constitute a separate occupational group. Likewise, participation in trance dances is very inclusive.

Of special significance in the therapeutic dance is a strong power that ultimately derives from God and has been referred to as spiritual energy or potent therapeutic substance. It is a healthful and beneficent power, but it can be misused and thus become dangerous too. In human beings, it is normally contained in the stomach area, but in therapeutic dances it becomes “heated” and rises to the head in the state of trance. When the spiritual energy is “hot” or “boiling,” the healer can see, among other things, the inside of sick bodies. He, or more rarely she, can even visit the divine heavenly realm. Traveling in extra-corporeal form occurs when the diagnosis indicates that the ill person has lost his or her soul. When the soul of the curer is set free for the journey to heaven, his or her body lies motionless.

A diagnosis may also reveal that the malady is caused by intrusion. In that case the healer must absorb or “pull out” the foreign object from the patient’s body. Miniature arrows and other objects may be sent by the spirits of the dead. When the spiritual energy of the healer is strong enough, he or she can remove such objects. Both the songs and the dance, as well as the fire, help to heat up this power. Some of the songs have been revealed by God in dreams or visions. The rhythm of such songs is monotonous, and the words do not belong to everyday language. Through the sweat of the healers, the healing as well as preventive spiritual power is transferred to all those who participate in a therapeutic dance ceremony.

God is seldom the direct cause of illness, although He may send afflictions and death through the lesser deity and spirits of the dead. The spiritual beings send diseases and death because they are unpredictable and morally two-sided. As a rule, misfortune is not interpreted as a result of misbehaviour or "sins." A person's wrongdoing against another is normally corrected or avenged in the social context rather than by God or other spiritual beings. One of the reasons why spirits of the dead may cause illness is that they are longing for the living. The process of sickness and dying can in such cases be seen as a struggle between two loving sets of relatives or friends, each wanting a certain individual for themselves. Like other aspects of San religion, the issue of spiritual beings as agents of illness and death, as well as of their assistance in terms of healing, is characterized by fluidity and has multiple answers.

There is much evidence from different periods of time that witchcraft and sorcery, or witchery, has been of little significance among the San. According to, among others, the anthropologist Matthias Guenther, these "social diseases" have to a limited extent been introduced by neighboring black peoples, but the San religion has always been devoid of these "black arts."¹¹ However, several features in the "shamanism" of the San, such as the ability to "fly," change shape into animal form, touch fire without being hurt, become invisible and seize "souls," are strikingly similar to witchcraft phenomena. Among peoples where there is belief in witchcraft, the power that helps healers in hunting-gathering cultures is morally inverted, although even among such peoples it *can* be used for healing and other positive or constructive purposes.

Recently, and among San groups such as the Nharo in the Ghanzi district of western Botswana, who are no longer hunters and gatherers, human agents of illness have become increasingly important. There a form of compartmentalization has occurred, so that there is a classification of afflictions into three main categories: "Bushmen diseases," which are cured in trance dances, "Bantu diseases," caused by witchery, and "European diseases," that is, new organic ailments such as tuberculosis. For treatment and curing of the "foreign" illnesses, Nharo depend on foreign specialists. Paradoxically, however, these changes have not diminished but rather increased the demand for therapeutic dances, in which even black neighbors occasionally participate. Concurrently with a rise in trance performances and the tendency of professionalization of the San art of healing, there has been a more general revitalization of religion and ethnic identity.¹²

Among the Sukuma, God the creator, whose most common name is Lyuba, which also means sun, is invoked only in connection with the veneration or cult of ancestors. He may, among other things, be asked to prevent or heal people from illnesses. As the ultimate master of life and death, God can occasionally punish evil-doers. In those rare cases when He is seen as a disease agent, the illnesses tend to be severe. If God decides to end the life of a person, there is no medicine or method of healing that can hinder death. A malady sent by God can also be interpreted as a warning.¹³

Like Lyuba, spirits of nature are seldom seen as agents of disease, and there is no organized cult of them. By far the most important Sukuma spirits causing illness are the ancestors. As in many other religions of agriculturalist peoples in decentralized societies, belief in and veneration or cult of spirits of ancestors, *masamva* (sing. *isamva*), have formed the predominant motif of Sukuma religion. Inheritance is normally

patrilineal, but all or any of a person's ancestors may influence the descendant's life and be objects of veneration. Spirits of ancestors influence the lives of their own living relatives but not those of others. Thus, they cannot cause, for instance, epidemics. In general, however, there are no specific illnesses caused by them. Unlike ordinary *masamva*, chiefly ancestors have been able to occasion illnesses and other problems not only to individuals but also on a territorial, or chiefdom, basis. Currently, however, such ancestors are of little or no significance.

If people suffer from ancestor-induced illnesses, it is because the ancestors have been offended or neglected in some way. For example, the living may have failed to observe lineage rules properly or neglected to conduct rituals in the name of certain ancestors. Descendants can also suffer because of past grievances. There are different sanctified objects and animals that represent the various ancestors, and miniature houses are built for them. These objects, animals, and houses must be handled with appropriate care, lest there be rampant problems of disease and other misfortunes. The content of rituals can vary from the spitting of a mixture of millet and water to the sacrificing of cows in connection with large feasts. In case of severe illnesses, there may be blood sacrifices.

There are different kinds of religious and medical experts among the Sukuma. Those who treat afflictions caused by ancestors must have support and power from the ancestors themselves. If disturbed relationships are manifested by illness or another misfortune, the duty of these healers or *bafumu* (sing. *nfumu*) is to restore harmony between living and dead. Ancestors may make their will known to healers through, for instance, dreams, visions and possession.

In recent decades, the importance of spirits of ancestors has decreased significantly among the Sukuma, as in other parts of Africa. Illness now seems to be the most important reason for the rare ceremonies of propitiation. Gradually, the importance of other spiritual agents of sickness, such as God, other deities or spirits of nature, has diminished too. By contrast, problems of witchery, called *bulogi* in Sukumaland, has in general been on the increase. Reports about witchery accusations, ordeals and killings of *balogi* (sing. *nlogi*, witch or sorcerer) from Sukuma areas during the period of German colonial rule, that is, before the Second World War, were rare. Later on, during the British colonial period and after that, accounts about such problems increased markedly. There have been several cases of killings of *balogi*, although usually accused people have been forced to migrate to other places.¹⁴

Balogi can occasion all kinds of illnesses and other problems, particularly serious ones, as well as death. There is a general tendency of restructuring—that is, attributing illnesses that were previously induced by ancestors to witchery causation. Not only close kinsfolk but also neighbors and affines can be feared and accused of witchery. *Balogi* are social and moral deviants who have allocated to themselves powers that the community considers harmful to itself. Recently, women, particularly co-wives in polygamous marriages, have formed the majority among the accused. *Bafumu* counteract the activities of *balogi*, and deal with problems induced by the latter. However, it does occur that they are also suspected for using their special powers for destructive purposes and in their own interests.

Most people know some simple forms of divination, but in serious cases they need assistance by *bafumu*, who are highly specialized in different forms of divination and healing. Most of the healers are men, but there are female *bafumu* too. Some of the

healers obtain knowledge from *masamva* through possession. The *bafumu* do not form an exclusive professional or priestly class, and at least in principle anybody can become an *nfumu*. Nowadays licenses are required, but many of the healers seem to prefer to remain outside the scrutiny of administrators at all levels. *Bafumu* play key roles in secret societies. An important function of such societies is to disclose or identify *balogi* and to provide remedies when people have been hurt by them. When novices are initiated into these societies, they are taught about the world of *bulogi* and how to avoid its evil and dangerous effects.

Towards a Wider Perspective

The decline of religious ideas and practices concerning, for instance, ancestors and other spiritual beings, which has been exemplified here particularly with the Sukuma, has been observed in many other parts of Africa too. Nowadays, illness and other types of misfortune no longer binds a group together in veneration of ancestor spirits sanctioning the moral and social order in the way they used to do. Increasingly, group solidarity is threatened by the proliferation of witchery problems,¹⁵ which reproduce themselves hand-in-hand with modern changes.¹⁶

According to Peter Geschiere, the rampant anxiety about such problems in many parts of Africa triggers “a desperate search for new protections to contain novel and therefore all the more frightening witchcraft threats.”¹⁷ When witchery is no longer confined to kin groups, people feel they are more vulnerable to evil-doers. Particularly in urban settings, fellow-workers, class-mates, and others can be accused of using extraordinary powers to harm other people. In many places, anyone may now risk being accused of bewitching anybody else. During the last few decades, the rapid spread of the serious AIDS disease has augmented the problems of witchery further.¹⁸

With more than five million HIV-positive persons, South Africa has more such people than any other Sub-Saharan country and, perhaps with the exception of India, more than any other country in the world. Partly because only about one quarter of South Africans with AIDS receive highly active antiretroviral therapy, many seek healing services of traditional healers and different kinds of “alternative” therapists. Like many other seriously ill persons, HIV-positive people tend to “shop around” or move freely between different kinds of health systems in search for help. Studies of, among others, Zulu healers reveal that some of them say that AIDS is a “new” or “modern” illness which they cannot cure, while others claim that they do have efficient solutions to this problem.¹⁹

For many Africans, in South Africa and elsewhere, there is a powerful association between AIDS and witchery. Adam Ashforth notes that common symptoms of AIDS, like persistent coughing, grave diarrhoea, abdominal pains, and wasting have long been associated with the malicious assaults of evil-doers with supranormal power. As pointed out by him, awareness of AIDS as an incurable disease induced by an invisible virus is rarely sufficient to make sense of the suffering and death that it causes. For people who believe in witchery, the question of *who* is to be blamed for the problem must be asked and answered too. The ultimate cause may be traced to the envy or jealousy of, for instance, neighbors, family-members, lovers, or work-mates.²⁰

Although witchery is a particularly important explanation for AIDS, there are other reasons too. For instance, in a recent study of healers living in informal shack settlements on the border of Cape Town's central business district, Elisabeth Mills has reported that the notion of pollution as a cause of AIDS, as well as of illness in general, emerged as a dominant theme.²¹ For instance, one of the healers referred to impurities in the blood as a cause of AIDS. Another one, a woman who was both a traditional healer and a Christian, believed that evil spirits could infect people with AIDS. However, she derived her knowledge of medicines and healing through dreams and communication with her ancestors, and used both traditional medicines and spiritual healing. Yet another healer agreed that HIV could be induced by evil spirits but added that it might also be a punishment inflicted by ancestors because of the move away from traditional values.

Typically, the healers advised their clients to go to a clinic, in addition to accepting the treatment that the former could offer themselves. All of those who were interviewed by Mills argued strongly for collaboration between traditional healers and biomedical practitioners. There are a good number of clinics in Cape Town, but in many parts of the countryside, people may have to travel very long distances to find one. By contrast, locating a traditional curer is seldom, if ever, difficult. It has been estimated that in South Africa there are more than 300,000 traditional healers who ply their trade, which is incomparably more than the number of practitioners in the bio-medically oriented health care system. In South Africa, as well as in other African countries, various organizations have launched HIV/AIDS training programs for traditional curers, but only small minorities of these healers have had access to such programs. Mills concludes in her study that distrust permeates the relationship between biomedical doctors and traditional healers. In particular, the former distrust the latter.²²

Some Interpretative Perspectives

One of the reasons for the weakening of indigenous African religions is the rapid advance of Christianity and Islam, although a great deal of the traditional religious heritage has been able to survive within the framework of the new religions. In the two main examples above, the spread of new religious ideas and practices, especially in Christian forms, has been more successful among the Sukuma than among the San. As touched upon earlier, in particular various kinds of born-again activist Christians fight against or demonize pre-Christian religions. Recently, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity have grown very rapidly in virtually all parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. In Pneumatic and Evangelical churches, as well as in Islamist organizations and movements, there is a great emphasis on education and health care. More secularly oriented education and biomedical health care have also contributed to weakening African indigenous religions, disease etiologies and healing systems.²³

Among San groups like the Nharo, who have been subject to particularly far-reaching socio-economic and other forms of upheaval, living humans have become more important as disease agents. The extraordinary power associated with the essen-

tially healing properties of San curers are increasingly believed to be used for destructive witchery purposes. Nharo workers are now economically dependent on black and white farmers. Serious social conflicts have created fertile ground for the introduction of Bantu-derived witchery problems. The rise of therapeutic dances is a reflection of increased existential stress, and Nharo healers have become more or less professionalized authority figures.²⁴

In Sukumaland, as in many other areas, one reason why people felt it became more difficult to countercheck problems of witchery was the colonial and postcolonial reforms and eventually abolishment of chieftainship. Previously, chiefs used to have important roles in the control of witchery. When chiefs no longer could take action against evil-doers, people felt they had to do it themselves, which in some cases led to the killing of accused people, particularly of women by men. In Sukumaland, the increased problems have also been connected to the emerging social inequalities caused by the growth of the cotton industry there.²⁵

The colonial attempts to control witchery, which largely failed, were one of the means to legitimate colonialism. Accounts about witches or sorcerers could be used to emphasize the superiority of "western rationality and civilization." The colonial and postcolonial political struggle against witchery has also been regarded as an important aspect of the process of modernization. When colonial regimes banned poison ordeals, many people viewed such decisions as an attempt to protect evil-doers from their innocent and defenseless victims. Deprived of traditional control mechanisms, witchery became a more disruptive and anti-social force. The use of protective medicines or amulets, another means of witchery control, was also attacked by colonial and postcolonial politicians, as well as by missionaries and other leaders within Christianity and Islam. Traditional curers who could provide such medicines were strongly criticized and sometimes sent to jail.²⁶

In many parts of Africa, witchery eradication or cleansing movements have arisen in response to modern changes bringing insecurity and anxiety. Such movements have a longer history than the colonial and postcolonial periods, but those periods were the times when they were particularly thriving. These movements tend to be innovative, finding new ways of handling witchery problems that are not criminal, and often cross religious as well as ethnic borders. Some Christian and Muslim leaders can have functions that are similar to those of traditional leaders' anti-witchcraft movements. The intention is to expose and deliver witches from their evil-doing. The activities of modern cleansing movements frequently manifest new syntheses and values rather than social breakdown.²⁷

Such movements aim at solving the problem of witchery by freeing or purifying the practitioners of their evil intent after confessions. By contrast, the goal of "witch-hunting" campaigns is to find and kill such people, or at least chase them away from their communities. As pointed out earlier, killings of perceived evil-doers have occurred in Sukumaland.²⁸ Recently, and sometimes in connection with the AIDS pandemic, such killings have happened in several other places too, among rural as well as among urban populations.²⁹ Even though the purpose of cleansing movements is not to kill human beings, there can occasionally be some violence, like beating and burning, involved in the attempts to make accused people confess.

Much research on witchery, particularly by anthropologists, has concentrated on social relationships in local contexts. This research has produced many important insights into the interaction between socio-religious and other social aspects. For instance, several scholars have observed that problems of human or socio-religious aspects of illness and other types of misfortune tend to be marginal, if present at all, among peoples or in contexts where there are sparse and irregular social relationships. Hunting-gathering San can be seen as an example of people with such relationships. By contrast, issues of witchery, as well as of belief in the dangerous power of cursing and of people with evil eyes, are likely to be more significant in contexts where humans press closely upon one another and where intensive social relations are ill defined.³⁰

Similarly, anthropologists have stressed that social tensions and competition, which are conducive to witchery accusations, tend to be more common in societies or situations where status is achieved rather than ascribed.³¹ Unlike historians, anthropologists usually do not focus primarily on processes of change. However, during colonial and postcolonial times, social relations became increasingly associated with achieved rather than ascribed status. Apparently, this is one of the reasons why human or socio-religious causation of illness and concomitant ways of healing were enlarged too. Among the San, the tendency of enhanced competition for social status and income has been seen especially among the Nharo farmers, and it is obvious among the Sukuma as well as among many other peoples.

Family bonds are now often stretched to breaking points by new inequalities, which is an important micro-political background to current problems of witchery in many parts of Africa. While kinship relations may continue to be an essential factor in studies of such problems, other aspects such as changing relationships between people of different sexes and generations, neighbors, work-mates, and adherents of competing religions have become increasingly important. Witchery accusations can also be involved in personal vendettas. Discourses of witchery may bridge gaps between the small-scale realities of domestic communities and the large-scale processes of change that have developed new forms of dependency, which are particularly frightening because they appear to be impersonal.³²

More than any time before, witchery problems must now be understood not only in local and kin-related contexts but also in broad regional, national, and even transnational perspectives. Despite official condemnations, current political elites are preoccupied with witchery issues. An example is provided by the American anthropologist Wyatt MacGaffey:

When Laurent Kabila's miscellaneous army displaced Mobutu in 1997, some of its units conceived their task as that of rounding up witches to purify the country of corruption . . . "Witchcraft" (that is, *kindoki*) is not primitive thought "surviving" in modern times and "adapting" to the stresses of modernity, but is itself a mode of modernity.³³ This is in line with the important remarks made by Jean and John Comaroff that, despite the predictions of modernization theory and historical materialism, the world has not been reduced to sameness and that "there are, in short, many modernities."³⁴ As stressed by Geschiere, it is important to study the possibilities of witchery discourses to gain control over modern changes. Hence there is a need to go beyond the common focus on accusations, which

tends to relate witchery to the reproduction of social orders. Because it can be dangerous to accuse people in power, this is seldom done. Thus, scholars who carry out field work need to “venture into the more vague spheres and try to make sense of the turmoil of rumours or the highly ambivalent and elusive role of the healers and how they affect social relations.”³⁵

Concluding Remarks

As a historically oriented scholar of religion, I have concentrated mainly on the gradual shift from suprahuman to human agents of disease and concomitant ways of healing. Examples have been given mainly from two peoples with different cultural and historical background, the still partly hunting-gathering San and the primarily agriculturalist or agro-pastoralist Sukuma, and from some contexts in South Africa that elucidate the serious current problem of AIDS. In the discussion of interpretative perspectives in research on illness and healing, it has been emphasized, in particular, that studies focusing on local contexts need to be supplemented by works that take wider regional, national and transnational processes into consideration.

Although this essay has focused on religious and socio-religious or human factors of illness and healing, it is of great significance not to overlook that there are also important aspects of natural causation and treatment. As a rule, African indigenous conceptions of sickness and curing are markedly holistic or multi-dimensional. As a consequence, there is a great need for multi- and inter-disciplinary perspectives and co-operation of research in this field.

Even though socio-economic and political analyses of continuity and change have been concentrated on in this essay, it should not be forgotten that there are also other important dimensions of religious and social ideas and practices of illness and healing. There are, for instance, cognitive and psychological factors. These have not been studied as much as social and biological dimensions. In future research, then, issues of meaning and evil, as well as emotional aspects of suffering caused by afflictions, belong to those areas where more research can be desired.

Notes

- 1 Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 315.
- 2 See, for example, David Westerlund, *African Indigenous Religions and Disease Causation: From Spiritual Beings to Living Humans* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2006), p. 210 and P.P. Gulliver, *A Preliminary Survey of the Turkana: A Report Compiled for the Government of Kenya* (Cape Town: School of African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1951), pp. 231–2.
- 3 Studies of the significance of naturalistic and impersonal causes and treatments of illnesses, mainly in Africa south of the Sahara, can be found in Edward C. Green *Indigenous Theories of Contagious Disease* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press / Sage Publications, 1999).

- 4 David Westerlund, "Pluralism and Change: A Comparative and Historical Approach to African Disease Etiologies", in Anita Jacobson-Widding and David Westerlund (eds), *Culture, Experience and Pluralism: African Ideas of Illness and Healing* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1989), pp. 177–80.
- 5 P.S. Yoder, "Knowledge of Illness and Medicine among the Cokwe of Zaire", *Social Science and Medicine*, 15 (1981), pp. 241–3.
- 6 Asonzeh F.-K. Ukah, "Born-Again Witches and Videos in Nigeria", in David Westerlund (ed.), *Global Pentecostalism: Encounters with Other Religious Traditions* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), pp. 73–92. Other interesting examples of the survival of pre-Christian ideas and practices of illness and healing can be found, for example, in Tabona Shoko's new book *Spiritual Healing in Zimbabwe: Continuity and Change* (Uppsala: Swedish Science Press, 2008).
- 7 In my recent book *African Indigenous Religions and Disease Causation* (see note 2 above), the San and Sukuma are two of five systematically selected main examples, the others being the Maasai in East Africa, the Kongo (*Bakongo*) in Central Africa and the Yoruba in West Africa.
- 8 For studies of the Kung and the Nharo, respectively, see for instance Richard B. Lee, *The Dobe !Kung* (New York: CBS College Publishing, 1984) and Matthias G. Guenther, *The Nharo Bushmen of Botswana: Tradition and Change* (Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 1986).
- 9 Two valuable studies on the Sukuma, both co-written by Frans Wijsen and Ralph Tanner, are *Seeking a Good Life: Religion and Society in Usukuma, Tanzania 1945–1995* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000) and *"I Am Just a Sukuma": Globalization and Identity Construction in Northwest Tanzania* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002). After the establishment of the union with Zanzibar in 1964, the name of the country became Tanzania.
- 10 My presentation here of San religion, illness and healing draws on several works. See my "Pluralism and Change", pp. 181–4 and *African Indigenous Religions and Disease Causation*, pp. 41–63, 150–4. See also Isaac Schapera, *The Khoisan Peoples of South Africa: Bushmen and Hottentots* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1930); Lorna Marshall, *The !Kung of Nyae Nyae* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); J. David Lewis-Williams, *Believing and Seeing: Symbolic Meanings in Southern San Rock Paintings* (London: Academic Press, 1981); Richard Katz, *Boiling Energy: Community Healing among the Kalahari Kung* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); and Matthias M. Guenther, *Tricksters and Trancers: Bushman Religion and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).
- 11 Matthias G. Guenther, "The San Trance Dance: Ritual and Revitalization among the Farm Bushmen of the Ghanzi District, Republic of Botswana", *Journal der Südwestafrikanische Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft* 30 (1976), p. 47.
- 12 Matthias G. Guenther, "The Trance Dancer as an Agent of Social Change among the Farm Bushmen of the Ghanzi District", *Botswana Notes and Records* 30 (1975), pp. 161–6. See also, for example, Matthias G. Guenther, "'Not a Bushmen Thing': Witchcraft among the Bushmen and Hunter-Gatherers", *Anthropos* 87: 1/3 (1992), pp. 83–107. For some information on human agents of illness among the Kung San, see for instance Katz, *Boiling Energy*, pp. 178, 263.
- 13 The presentation of Sukuma religion, illness and healing is based on several works. More detailed documentation can be found in my own previous studies "Pluralism and Change", pp. 188–91 and *African Indigenous Religions and Disease Causation*, pp. 85–101, 168–172. In addition to the two studies by Wijsen and Tanner, mentioned in note 9,

- other works of special significance are, for example, C. R. Hatfield Jr, "The Nfumu in Tradition and Change: A Study of the Position of Religious Practitioners among the Sukuma of Tanzania, E. A." (Ph.D. thesis, Catholic University of America, Washington DC, 1968); M. B. Reid, "Persistence and Change in the Health Concepts and Practices of the Sukuma of Tanzania, East Africa" (Ph.D. thesis, Catholic University of America, Washington DC, 1969); and Per Brandström, "Boundless Universe: The Culture of Expansion of the Sukuma-Nyamwezi in Tanzania" (Ph.D. thesis, Department of Cultural Anthropology, University of Uppsala, 1990). A more popular, but nevertheless important, book is Frans Wijsen's *"There Is Only One God": A Social-Scientific and Theological Study of Popular Religion and Evangelization in Sukumaland, Northwest Tanzania* (Kampen: Kok, 1993). Much valuable unpublished material, written mainly in French, can be found in the archive of the White Fathers (Padri Bianchi) in Rome.
- 14 For an important example of this problem, see Ralph E.S. Tanner, *The Witch Murders in Sukumaland: A Sociological Commentary* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1970).
 - 15 Some more examples can be found, for instance, in Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), pp. 7, 21; Mary Douglas, "Sorcery Accusations Unleashed: The Lele Revisited", *Africa* 69: 2 (1999), pp. 177–93; and E. Colson, "The Father as Witch", *Africa* 70: 3 (2000), pp. 334–335. See further Westerlund, *African Indigenous Religions and Disease Causation*, pp. 189–91.
 - 16 Even though that is not the focus of this study, it should be mentioned that, in addition to the gradual shift from religious to human agents of illness, an increased importance of the category of natural causation and treatment has been observed in many parts of Africa too.
 - 17 Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, p. 216.
 - 18 See, for example, Bawa Yamba, "Cosmologies in Turmoil: Witchfinding and AIDS in Chiawa, Zambia", *Africa* 67: 2 (1997) and Colson, "The Father as Witch", p. 353. For an interesting study of the great current significance of witchery as explanation for epilepsy, see Roy Baskind and Gretchen Birbeck, "Epilepsy Care in Zambia: A Study of Traditional Healers", *Epilepsia* 46: 7 (July 2005), pp. 1121–6. See also, for instance, Emilio Ovuga, Jed Boardman and Elisabeth G. A. O. Oluka, "Traditional Healers and Mental Illness in Uganda", *Psychiatric Bulletin* 23 (1999), p. 277.
 - 19 Nicoli Nattrass, "The Quest for Healing in South Africa's Age of AIDS", *Social Dynamics* 31: 2 (2005), pp. 5–6.
 - 20 Adam Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence and Democracy in South Africa* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), pp. 9, 69, 107.
 - 21 Elisabeth Mills, "HIV Illness Meanings and Collaborative Healing Strategies in South Africa", *Social Dynamics* 31: 2 (2005).
 - 22 Mills, "HIV Illness Meanings", pp. 127, 143, 148–9, 151.
 - 23 See further Westerlund, *African Indigenous Religions and Disease Causation*, pp. 189–94.
 - 24 Guenther, *The Nharo Bushmen of Botswana*, pp. 288–95; Guenther, *Tricksters and Trancers*, chapter 8.
 - 25 Tanner, *The Witch Murders in Sukumaland*, pp. 39–40; Wijsen and Tanner 2002, pp. 135–7.
 - 26 See further, for example, Steven Feierman, "Struggles for Control: The Social Roots of Health and Healing in Modern Africa", *African Studies Review* 28: 2/3, p. 87; Geschiere,

- The Modernity of Witchcraft*, p. 15; and Douglas, "Sorcery Accusations Unleashed", p. 181.
- 27 For more detailed discussions, see for instance A.A. Lee, "Ngoja and Six Theories of Witchcraft Eradication", *Ufahamu* 6: 3 (1976), pp. 101–17; Colson, "The Father as Witch", pp. 343–4; T. Multhaupt, *Hexerei und Antihexerei in Afrika* (Munich: Trickster, 1990), pp. 38–41.
 - 28 See note 14 above.
 - 29 For some examples, see Jonathan Stadler, "Witches and Witch-Hunters: Witchcraft, Generational Relations and the Life Cycle in a Lowveld Village", *African Studies* 55: 1 (1996), p. 108; Yamba, "Cosmologies in Turmoil", p. 203; and Colson, "The Father as Witch", p. 334.
 - 30 This perspective can be found, for instance, in the well-known anthropologist Mary Douglas' introduction "Thirty Years after *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic*", in her own edited volume *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations* (London: Tavistock, 1970).
 - 31 A classical example is John Middleton and E.H. Winter, "Introduction", in John Middleton and E. H. Winter (eds), *Witchcraft and Sorcery in East Africa* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 18.
 - 32 See further for example Multhaupt, *Hexerei und Antihexerei in Afrika*, p. 32; Peter Geschiere and C. Fisiy, "Domesticating Personal Violence: Witchcraft, Courts and Confessions in Cameroon", *Africa* 64: 3, pp. 325–6; Stadler, "Witches and Witch-Hunters", pp. 87–9; Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, pp. 9, 24–5; Douglas, "Sorcery Accusations Unleashed", pp. 182–185.
 - 33 Wyatt MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture: The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 226–7.
 - 34 Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Introduction", in Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (eds), *Modernity and Its Malcontents* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), p. xi.
 - 35 Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, pp. 14–15, 219.

CHAPTER 32

Religion and Politics in Africa

Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar

What is Religion?

One of the main difficulties in discussing the relation between religion and any other sphere of life in Africa is determining where the boundaries of religion lie, or what constitutes religion as opposed to some other type of activity or thought. We therefore need to address at the outset the question of what precisely is meant by religion. Providing an answer to this question is not best done by examining the dozens of definitions given by scholars over many years and simply choosing the most pleasing of them. Rather, for the social scientist in search of understanding, it is a matter of making empirical observations of a broad field of human thought and action—in the present case, in regard to sub-Saharan Africa—and sifting through this material to discern common patterns. It is in considering the resemblance of such patterns that it becomes possible to formulate a working definition, in other words a provisional statement that does not purport to identify the essential nature of religion in all historical periods, but that has the lesser ambition of clarifying what is meant by religion in regard to a specific time and place. A working definition of this type can be adapted in future as new data become available (Platvoet and Molendijk, 1999), not only as researchers access new information, but as patterns of behavior themselves change over time.

In a series of publications on Africa beginning with our book *Worlds of Power*, published in 2004 (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004:14), we have proposed a working definition of religion in Africa as “a belief in the existence of an invisible world, distinct but not separate from the visible one, that is home to spiritual beings with effective powers over the material world.” This definition has been elaborated with a view to incorporating the entire range of religious practices and ideas in Africa, although it is useful to note in passing that it applies to many other parts of the world, too. It is deliberately couched in terms that are morally neutral and value-free. It allows for the inclusion of a broad range of mystical beliefs and practices, irrespective of whether observers

consider them to be positive or negative. The significance of this last remark is that it includes space to incorporate many types of activity sometimes subsumed in such categories as “magic,” “superstition,” and “the occult” (Ter Haar and Ellis, 2009).

It is notable that the above working definition of religion in Africa has scope to include certain types of harmful beliefs and practices that are quite frequently reported in Africa, such as, for example, witchcraft-related violence. It can also encompass such anti-social and even criminal activities as killings carried out in order to obtain body parts supposedly useful in the manufacture of powerful “medicine,” also quite frequently reported from many parts of the continent. Such activities may occur rarely or never in some parts of the world, and can not be considered to fall within any mainstream concept of religion as defined in regard to North America or Western Europe, for example (2009). This is precisely the point of determining what is meant by “religion” in regard to a particular historical context rather than assuming from the outset that religion has the same meaning in all times and places. What may count as “religion” in one society may not be included in that category in another time and place.

Historical Concepts of Power

Religious activity in Africa is centrally concerned with the acquisition or retention of power in its most fundamental sense, namely the power to prosper, to be fertile and productive, and simply to live. “To live is to have power, to be sick or to die is to have less of it” writes the South African theologian Allan Anderson (1991:67). “A person who is oppressed, who must daily face injustice and affronts to his personal dignity, is a person who lacks power” (1991:69). This is coupled with the belief that the invisible world, differentiated but not separated from the material world, can be accessed by appropriate techniques of religious communication, such as divination and spirit possession. Many Africans believe they can shape their relations with the spirits inhabiting the invisible world and thus affect their own destiny.

It is in its relationship to a rather general and diffuse power to live and prosper that religion has its closest relationship to politics, generally defined in terms of the activities relating to conflicts of interests and values that affect the whole of society, and efforts to accommodate them. The concepts of religion and politics are a standard part of the vocabulary of social science, yet it can be demonstrated that these are not concepts that occur in something like their modern sense in all societies. “African languages had no word for ‘religion’,” according to Elizabeth Isichei (2004:4), prior to evangelization by Christian missionaries, and no equivalent experience of the types of practice that are signified by that word. To take a specific example, John Peel has noted (2000:88–122) in regard to the Yoruba of Nigeria that a wide range of what would now be regarded as indigenous religious practices were subsumed in the expression “making country fashion,” used by West African speakers of English in the nineteenth century. A reading of African history generally supports the view that before wide-scale evangelization and colonization, practices of communication with an invisible world were woven into daily life and were generally considered an integral part of power as a whole, usually subject to institutional checks and balances.

As far as can be ascertained, in every African society before colonial times, power was closely associated with authority over the ritual practices that members of a community believed necessary for health, fertility of both land and population, and the reproduction of society—in fact for life itself. From a twenty-first-century viewpoint, we can hardly avoid labeling power of this sort as political by nature. However, a fundamental tenet of historical writing is to avoid as far as possible the error of anachronism, or the imposition of an idea that is inapplicable to the historical time and place under scrutiny. The terms “politics” and “religion,” used in social science to signify respectively struggles over the control of material resources and a relationship with a perceived immaterial domain, may represent just such an anachronism.

We are not arguing that there exists an authentic Africa that stands outside time and that incorporates a primal view of the cosmos. Rather, we are arguing that Africa, like other parts of the world, has a history. It can be demonstrated that ideas concerning the nature of power, and the close connection between its material and immaterial aspects, can be traced throughout this history, changing over time. At the same time, one has to take account of the degree to which ideas and institutions originally introduced into Africa by Europeans have become assimilated into African societies. Consideration of this point is aided by the existence of a substantial body of literature, produced notably by academic specialists in the study of religion, which investigates the long historical pedigree of the term “religion” as it is presently used. This literature reveals the relationship between political power, intellectual authority, and social practice in the formation of new, globalized, ideas of religion in recent centuries (e.g. Asad, 1993, Masuzawa, 2005).

In short, an analyst of contemporary Africa is confronted with the problem that it is hardly possible to avoid using the words “religion” and “politics” to designate two distinct aspects of power, conceived in regard to a spiritual world and a material world respectively, since contemporary conventions, enshrined in law, conform to such a separation of power into distinct domains. However, there is no known example of any African society before the nineteenth century making similar distinctions and having a directly comparable vocabulary of power. It is clear that, suffusing the institutions created in Africa in colonial times, some of the older notions of power are still widely held. Whatever the constitution and law code may state, in fact, many people believe that the material and immaterial aspects of the world are organically joined. This perception plays a major role in causing Africans to act in the way they do.

Some of the effects of these processes of categorization have been well described in regard to his own country by the Korean scholar Chin Hong Chung (2007). He notes that before the late nineteenth century the Korean language had no equivalent to the word “religion.” It was an alien term that entered Korea as part of a more general process of modernization, in this case transmitted via Japan. According to Chung (2007:206):

[t]he concept of religion never succeeded in incorporating our experience fully, and it has been utilised as an inappropriate measure and criterion in the description and understanding of our traditional belief culture. It is unavoidable, therefore, to reach the point where the empirical reality of traditional religious experience and its expression is distorted, devalued, and confused by such a newly enforced word as “religion.”

In Africa, a similar process took place to the one outlined by Chung in regard to Korea.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the introduction of a new vocabulary regarding the invisible world was part of a far more general imposition of new administrative arrangements and practices of power of western origin or inspiration. Among the novelties of the age of colonialism was the identification of religion and politics as two distinct realms, which should properly be subject to institutional and intellectual separation. This new vocabulary and conceptual order gave a new meaning to ideas and practices in African societies concerning the invisible world, cutting across existing categories and thereby distorting the empirical reality of indigenous religious experience as well as its various expressions. It is for this reason that many African scholars in the field of religion have reacted against the vocabulary and some of the conceptual categories that were introduced in the nineteenth century. As David Westerlund (1985:87–8) has noted:

In the works of African scholars there is often sharp criticism of Western terms designating different aspects of African religion. Many of these terms are considered to be inadequate and derogatory. For instance, words like “animism” and “fetishism” are considered inappropriate as general labels of African religion, and it is stressed that they have been used by Western scholars in order to ridicule this religion.

Generally speaking, one may identify two phases in the history of the study of religion in Africa (Platvoet, 1996). The first of these can be described as “Africa as object,” referring to an early period in which religious data were studied by scholars from outside Africa, many of them amateur ethnographers. This cohort of early foreign collectors, antiquaries and observers established many of the basic approaches, methods, concepts and labels used subsequently in the study of religion in Africa. A second phase is that of “Africa as subject,” when similar data were also being studied by professionally trained specialists, including African scholars, most recently based in African universities. Accompanying this change of phase from Africa-as-object to Africa-as-subject was a change in the moral value that observers ascribed to religion in Africa.

Religion, Politics, and National States

Most African countries since colonial times have been officially governed through institutions based on a western model of separation of church and state. This institutional architecture of government has tended to obscure the reality of spiritual power in Africa’s public life. Like politicians the world over, Africa’s political leaders spend most of their time in the pursuit or distribution of material resources, and their cultivation of spiritual power is usually more private than public. The fact that religion and politics are two facets of power that, in Africa, are in constant interaction is not always evident to observers of African politics. But in Africa cultivating spiritual power is a vital component of a political career, as is widely attested by the popular media and *radio trottoir*.

In the high Victorian period, missionaries and colonizers generally considered indigenous African religious practices to be pretty much uniformly contemptible because they did not constitute “true” religion, with a partial exception being made only for

Islam. Early Christian evangelists often considered indigenous religious practices as “a kind of absence,” as Peel (2000:12) has noted in regard to Nigeria. In other words, they were not perceived to have any real substance. In general, it was only after the institution of colonial rule that opinions like these tended to change somewhat. Some colonial officials, spending long periods in Africa, came to see the complexity and subtlety of African religious ideas. If only for administrative purposes, they had to learn to understand the relationship of indigenous religion to justice, land tenure, and other matters affecting the social and political order. The colonial period also witnessed the arrival of professional anthropologists in Africa, who tended to view African religious ideas and practices in functional terms, as the cultural epiphenomena associated with specific social and political complexes bearing an ethnic label. Thus was the concept of ethnic religions formed, with a plethora of books on Zulu religion, Yoruba religion, and many others. That Africa was best understood as being divided into thousands of discrete ethnic communities, each having its own culture and its own religion, was a view characteristic of European administrators and scholars until quite late in the colonial period. There also emerged texts from African intellectuals trained in European methods who were able to describe in the academic vocabulary of their day the religious and cultural traditions that they knew from within (e.g. Kenyatta, 1938).

One could use a similar categorization regarding the literature on politics in Africa. This too was originally represented by most foreign writers not so much in terms of an autonomous political field, as simply a body of traditional practices to be studied through ethnology. Comparative treatment of political systems began (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, 1940) more or less at the same time that African leaders emerged who could articulate statements concerning rights, interests and obligations in a way that conformed to a European understanding of politics.

In the international context after the establishment of the United Nations in 1945, political leaders of this type were generally considered to be nationalists. In other words, there is a clear relationship between the emergence of several forces or factors simultaneously in the mid-twentieth century. These are: a concept of a distinct political field in Africa corresponding more or less to a European idea of politics; the emergence of a nationalist leadership; and international pressure to dismantle European colonial empires and to replace them with sovereign states. Modern African politics, conceived in a western mode, flourished during this period. Other conceptions of power tended to be regarded by commentators as not belonging to the political field. This included movements regarded as religious in nature, which were considered to be unconnected to politics in a modern political system.

By the time African countries gained political independence, from the late 1950s onwards, the colonial administrations that were then disappearing and the expatriate colonial society associated with them included quite a few individuals who had come to appreciate the subtlety and social usefulness of African religious thought. They found common cause with African intellectuals who were, by this time, able to express their ideas in print more easily than before. African theologians of the generation of Bolaji Idowu (1962) and John Mbiti (1969) turned colonial values on their heads, much as nationalist ideologues were also doing, by claiming that certain elements of Africa's cultures previously condemned by Europeans as negative should in fact be

considered positively. Many writers in this genre, European or African, were themselves practicing Christians or, at least, had undergone a church or missionary education that had impressed on them the basic tenets of Christian religion.

African theologians in particular in the mid- to late twentieth century articulated what may be called a “theology of continuity” (Westerlund, 1985:89). This refers to a process of interpreting African religious ideas and practices in the light of Christianity, in such a way as to identify elements of African indigenous religions that appeared to resemble or anticipate aspects of Christian belief. Typical of this enterprise was the construction of African Traditional Religion—in the singular, and with capital letters—as a system of belief comparable to other major religions. One result of this change of perspective was to suggest that the African sub-continent is not divided into autonomous areas, each with its own distinctive religion corresponding to an ethnic identity, as earlier generations of Europeans had often supposed. Instead, commentators now tended to discern some of the similarities between religious ideas and practices over wide tracts of Africa, for example in regard to healing, noting that certain cults may mobilize people over very wide areas, creating a religious geography that transcends political boundaries (Ranger, 1991).

Contemporary Writing on Religion and Politics

From 1945 until today, the international system has required the existence in every one of the UN’s member-states of an apparatus of power that corresponds to a global understanding of what constitutes a government. People aspiring to wield power in each one of these countries are required to articulate their ideas to greater or lesser degree in terms that correspond to an international view of politics, based on the existence of nation-states. Consequently, not only academic specialists in political science, but also journalists, diplomats, and others, routinely analyze African societies in terms of a political field that corresponds to a notion of the separation of powers. However, this has considerable difficulty in assimilating movements of obvious political importance that are nonetheless suffused with the vocabulary of religion, such as Alice Lakwena’s Holy Spirit Movement or Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army, both in Uganda. In fact, throughout Africa, many political movements contain a religious element that is hard to square with a rigid separation of the material and invisible worlds.

Academic specialists on religion in Africa, meanwhile, may be broadly separated into those writing within the discipline of religious studies and that of anthropology. Anthropologists in particular have often supposed that religion in Africa is actually about something other than what its proponents claim. A movement of spiritual renewal such as the evangelical movement, for example, is often supposed by anthropologists and many other social scientists to be a response to problems that are fundamentally economic and political in nature. This approach owes something to the Marxist proposition that ideologies are only a reflection of a fundamental disposition towards productive forces.

A distinct change in the modes of understanding African politics, and the relationship to religion, may be detected in the late twentieth century. This corresponds to the implosion of several African states, required to make major organizational changes by

the liberal economic policies required by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and their loss of external patrons after the end of the Cold War. Somalia, Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and many others became considered as “failed,” “collapsed,” or “fragile” states. Much attention was focused on movements of political and military contestation that no longer took the form of old-style liberation movements, with agendas for state policy, but rather were less easily recognizable movements often without clear ideological goals that made open use of religious or spiritual techniques, like the Kamajors of Sierra Leone and the Mai-Mai of Congo with their supposedly bullet-proof amulets.

In everyday life too, there were major religious “revival” movements in Christian, Muslim, and neo-traditional form. Consequently, it has become quite fashionable for anthropologists to take topics related to religion as objects of study. Prominent examples include the study of neo-pentecostal movements and of witchcraft. Both of these are expressions of religious thought and practice. Pentecostalism is universally acknowledged as a particular form of religion, but it is often treated by anthropologists with only scant regard for its global history and theological content. Witchcraft is usually studied without reference to religion at all—although, being concerned with a belief in mystical forces, witchcraft falls within the scope of religion (Ter Haar, 2007) according to the definition we use.

Perhaps the most influential writers on the new salience of religious idioms in politics and daily life have been the anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff (1999a). Writing about attempts to achieve power and prosperity by accessing a spirit world, they have argued that what they term “occult economies” are a response to neoliberal globalization. In effect, people who aspire to get rich, and who are unable fully to comprehend how wealth can seemingly be conjured from nothing in the globalized world by the technical manipulations of finance, attempt to secure wealth by recourse to spiritual forces. In regard to South Africa, for example, they argue that this, “like other postrevolutionary societies, appears to have witnessed a dramatic rise in occult economies: in the deployment, real or imagined, of magical means for material ends.” This was said to be happening at the end of the twentieth century because of “the encounter of rural South Africa with the contradictory effects of millennial capitalism and the culture of neo-liberalism. This encounter . . . brings “the global” and “the local” . . . into a dialectical interplay” (1999a:279). As Terence Ranger (2007:277–9) has shown, this argument concerning the connection between “occult economies” and globalization is an updated version of a much older argument to the effect that attempts to access the invisible world by quasi-traditional means are the despairing gesture of societies unable to cope with forces that their members do not understand. This was what Max Gluckman called “the magic of despair” (2007:277). It is apparent that there is a thread in several generations of anthropological literature that represents Africans as grasping unsuccessfully, using inadequate techniques, to understand and control the world around them. The vocabulary used by scholars has changed over the years but the theme remains the same, as they continue to interpret a wide range of behaviour directed towards the invisible world as a sort of politics of despair.

Another prominent school of thought concerning the connection between religion and politics, comes from religious studies and is associated particularly with the work of Paul Gifford. Based on close observation of evangelical movements in a variety of

countries, Gifford assesses these in terms of their usefulness or otherwise for development. Interested in practical solutions to real problems, he poses the question whether particular religious trends help or hinder development. It is sometimes argued, for example, that the emphasis on deliverance found in neo-pentecostalism diminishes individuals' sense of personal responsibility for their own financial circumstances, as does the rhetoric of miracles. The religious views of charismatics—the argument goes—do nothing to encourage productivity or a work ethos. The spiritualization of politics can thus play into the hands of the worst dictators, who are able to use religion as a channel of political support (e.g. Gifford, 1993, 2004). “In what way have religious revivals affected resources or made life more successful, and how could one show that?,” Gifford (2005:247) asks. “Are modifications of religious ideas in fact leading to Africa's economic and political progress?”

These questions address the deeper issue of what is meant by notions such as “progress” and “development” (Ter Haar, 2011). Just as with religion, definitions of these concepts need to be related to the ideas and even the epistemologies of particular societies: not everyone in the world conceives of progress in the same terms. It is therefore erroneous to assume, as some authors do, that an improvement of material and institutional conditions would necessarily reduce the hegemonies of the spirit that are apparent in Africa, and would instead stimulate the language of liberal secularism. Rather, a religious mode of apprehending reality (even one couched in a spirit idiom) constitutes an epistemology that is simultaneously traditional and modern, capable of updating and renewing itself as times change (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2007).

African epistemologies include religious perspectives affecting popular understandings of concepts such as progress and development, but also justice, prosperity, and others (Ter Haar and Ellis, 2006) that are conventionally regarded as key topics within the political field. Accordingly, the ways in which Africans debate these matters should not be assumed to be apolitical because they are expressed in spiritual idioms. One example is “good governance,” an expression widely used in development circles, but which serves poorly as an analytical concept due to its implicit value-judgement. The word “good” in this expression invites judgement in regard to technical excellence, but it also conveys a moral concept. For many Muslims, for example, good governance implies a society that is ultimately ruled in conformity with divine law. Among both Muslims and non-Muslims in Africa, the moral nature of power depends on the manner of its exercise. Charismatic preachers preoccupied with Satan are not necessarily externalizing responsibility for the misfortunes of the society they live in, but may rather be considered as condemning the actual presence of evil within their society. Such criticisms are typically expressed in a spirit idiom and are often extended to national politics, as we have demonstrated at length in *Worlds of Power*.

In a review article concerning Gifford's work, the Nigerian scholar Ogbu Kalu has pointed out how western opinions on these matters tend to contrast with the analyses of African scholars (Kalu, 2006). These include both leading scholars operating from within social science disciplines, such as Jacob Olupona (1991), and prominent theologians, like Kwame Bediako (1995). Perhaps their most distinctive difference from leading western writers is the seriousness with which they discuss perceptions of the African spirit world and the beliefs and practices related to it. For them, the spirit world

is not a metaphor for anything more “real,” and nor does it represent an outdated mode of thinking. A younger generation of African scholars, concerned with modern expressions of religion such as charismatic movements or new independent churches, is multidisciplinary in approach and regards theology as an intellectual trend that is relevant to social scientists. They take the African context as their point of departure, which means that they study religious modes of thought in their own right, rather than reproducing theories produced elsewhere. This underlines the importance of taking into account studies by scholars living and working in Africa. Some recent works in this emerging vein are by Matthews Ojo (2006b) and Asonzeh Ukah (2008).

Most studies of religion in the field of social studies, however excellent they may be, remain based on a historical model positing the separation of a religious and a secular realm. Such studies almost invariably translate religious data (assumed to be a second order of truth at best) into sociological terms (assumed to correspond to reality). Anthropology has a long record of considering African religions, but has tended to do so as cultural artefacts rather than as “real” religions. Furthermore, anthropology in particular has often considered African societies in an ethnographic present rather than in historical terms. Although many anthropologists nowadays would claim that these problems have been rectified, and that they do now place the phenomena they analyse in historical context, such an assertion remains open to question.

The Way Forward

In our view, any attempt to understand the connection between religion and politics in Africa has to begin by listening to what Africans are saying and by taking African epistemologies seriously. Only then can one pass to a second stage of attempting to incorporate the relevant data into a formal theory with the power to explain a range of social and political phenomena. Moreover, this is not an enterprise that concerns Africa alone. Given the extent and depth of new alignments or realignments of religion and politics throughout the world, it is possible that a theory developed on the basis of data from Africa could also provide new insights for analyzing developments in other parts of the world, including notably Asia and the Middle East. Scholars therefore have a rare opportunity to show that Africa is not disconnected from world affairs and that the study of Africa can help in developing a better understanding of these.

Religion and politics are undoubtedly forming new patterns in many parts of the world. This does not mean, however, that a religious revival is taking place worldwide, as is often suggested. The new patterns of religion and politics discernible in Africa and other places are of course affected by phenomena such as state failure, globalization, and economic crisis, as many commentators have pointed out, but that is not the heart of the matter. The heart of the matter, rather, is that many people in the world, just as in sub-Saharan Africa, consider power as having its ultimate origin in the invisible world. This, we argue, has a marked influence on the conduct of politics and on political attributes such as authority and legitimacy.

CHAPTER 33

Religion and Development

Steve de Gruchy

Introduction

In the period from 1948 to 1990 the Church in South Africa resisted the apartheid government, with varying degrees of commitment and success. With the changes in the first half of the 1990s, however, the Church began to shift “from resistance to assistance” and think of ways in which it could be a partner with other key role players in society—government, NGOs, trades unions, and the private sector—in the reconstruction and development of South Africa. The South African Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches capture this desire in the *Statement on Reconstructing and Renewing the Church in South Africa* that grew out of a 1995 conference. Participants stated: “We need to be in critical solidarity with the Government of National Unity. Engaging with it in the creation of a new and just social order, fully involving ourselves in reconstruction and development.” The Statement highlighted moral leadership, demilitarization, economic justice, refugees, HIV/AIDS, and the breakdown of family life,¹ as issues the Church faces as it seeks to participate in the development of the country.

This essay seeks to reflect on some of these concerns for the Church in South Africa through a consideration of a key process in the global development world, namely the UN Millennium Summit from 6 to 8 September 2000, in which a large number of heads of state and government gathered in New York City at the UN headquarters. It undertakes this task because it recognizes how fundamental it is for the Church and Christians in South Africa to stay in touch with development issues raised in the “secular” world. The issues raise questions for further theological reflection, and the background given here offers a starting point.

The Millennium Assembly Process, Report, Summit and Declaration En Route to the Summit

The Millennium Summit had its origins in 1996 when the Secretary-General Kofi Annan proposed that the General Assembly in 2000 be called “The Millennium Assem-

bly,” and that it would include a summit, a non-governmental Millennium Forum, and a special commission “to examine the relations among the various component parts of the United Nations system.”² Between the end of 1997 and middle of 2000, the Secretary-General drew on a range of processes and sources to implement this vision. Some of these were internal to the UN, such as the Administrative Committee on Coordination, or specialized focus events of a cross-sectoral nature that involved the UN or its institutional bodies. Alongside this was a more wide-ranging and representative process, namely a series of consultations in 1999 in five regional centers throughout the globe, that drew together representatives from governments and civil society, resource people, development partners, and UN officials.

To illustrate the work of these consultations we may note the one that took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 24 and 25 June 1999, under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).³ It met around three sub-themes: cooperation for economic and social development in Africa; approaching humanitarian and human rights issues within a global context; and addressing the challenges of development, peace, and security in Africa. A final segment addressed the role of the UN in the twenty-first century. This event produced a report⁴ which then fed into the whole Millennium process. The African report raised four key issues of particular concern to Africa that constitute the challenge to the UN in the twenty-first century: (1) sustainable development, (2) peace and security, (3) developing new approaches to humanitarian and human rights issues, and (4) the search for a development cooperation approach and framework that works.

This African regional consultation was one of five such consultations. Alongside this process, open-ended discussions within the UN plenary helped to shape the thematic content of the Summit, and meetings were held with non-governmental organizations through the Executive Committee for the Millennium Forum and the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations. Other internal UN committee meetings reflected on these matters and the UN system itself. Out of this process five overall themes emerged which led to the title of the Millennium Summit: “The United Nations in the twenty-first century.”⁵

We the Peoples: Kofi Annan’s Millennium Report

Drawing on the consultative process described above, Secretary-General Kofi Annan produced “*We the Peoples: the role of the United Nations in the 21st century*.”⁶ This 50-page report was published five months prior to the Summit. It sought to place before the leadership of national governments, the UN, and civil society the key concerns that had been drawn together. The report is divided into seven chapters. The first two, “New century, new challenges” and “Globalisation and governance,” set the scene for the rest of the report, making the challenges of the new millennium clear. They touch on a theme that emerges throughout the report and offer a taste of its response: globalization is a reality, we cannot wish it away, but we need to make it “work better” for all the people of the planet.

The bulk of the report then falls into four major chapters that highlight the central concerns that emerged through the consultative process. The first two follow the founding concerns of the UN in 1945 (“Freedom from want,” chap. 3; and “Freedom from fear,” chap. 4), whereas the fifth chapter deals with a concern that was not even dreamt about in 1945, namely sustaining the environment for human life under the heading “Sustaining our Life.” The focus moves in chapter 6 to one of the key motivations for the summit itself, “Renewing the United Nations.” It identifies the major issues for consideration by the Summit, as follows.

First, the report states the commitment to free people from the abject and dehumanizing poverty in which more than 1 billion of them are currently confined. Second it pledges to do all it takes to free people from the scourge of war, violence of civil conflict, and the weapons of mass destruction. Third, the UN is committed to free people, especially all children and grandchildren, from the danger of living on a planet irredeemably spoilt by human activities and whose resources can no longer provide for their needs. Finally the report expresses a desire to make the United Nations a more effective instrument as all people pursue all three of these priorities. These challenges are accompanied by a set of clearly articulated outcomes, such as “to halve, by the time this century is 15 years old, the proportion of the world’s people whose income is less than one dollar a day,” and “to adopt and ratify the Kyoto Protocol, so that it can enter into force by 2002 and to ensure that its goals are met, as a step towards reducing emissions of greenhouse gases.”

Engagement with Civil Society

As noted, one of the key issues to emerge out of the preparation for the Summit was the specific and intentional focus on civil society.⁷ Representatives from NGOs and religious organizations were invited to be part of the five regional consultations that made an input into the Millennium Report, and they were also given a unique opportunity to engage with the report in two large gatherings that preceded the Summit, namely the Millennium Forum and the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders. The Millennium Forum drew together 1,350 representatives from over 1,000 NGOs from more than 100 countries, in New York from 22 to 26 May 2000.⁸ Four objectives were expressed: to consult with a range of representatives; to assemble “innovative ideas and creative experiences;” to project a vision for the future built on these ideas and experiences; and to make suggestions about how people could participate more effectively in the UN system.⁹ The Forum understood itself as being in continuity with a range of other civil society gatherings in the preceding years,¹⁰ and key decisions and commitments from these other forums were fed into the Millennium Forum.

From it came a 21-page document entitled *We the Peoples: Millennium Forum Declaration and Agenda for Action: Strengthening the United Nations for the 21st Century*.¹¹ The report begins with a focus on globalization, making clear that part of the purpose of the Forum was “to channel our collective energies by reclaiming globalization for and by the people.” A vision of a “human-centered and genuinely democratic” world is threatened by “corporate-driven globalization,” and so globalization needs to be brought

under the control of the people, with a democratized UN and vibrant civil society “as guarantors of this accountability.” Most of the report deals with the practical steps necessary to achieve this. Six themes are chosen and each one is dealt with quite practically in terms of steps that can be taken by the UN itself, by national governments, and by civil society. These six themes follow those of the Millennium Report, though the theme of globalization receives a specific focus. The language of this Forum Declaration is much freer and more combative than that of the Millennium Report and the final Declaration, which is to be expected considering those who participated in the Forum and contributed to its declaration.

The second main gathering of representatives of civil society was in the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, also held in New York from 28 to 31 August 2000.¹² Among the religions that were represented were Baha’i, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Indigenous Peoples, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shinto, Sikhism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism. This gathering made clear that with 3% of the world’s population adhering to a formal religious or spiritual belief, “religion represents an extraordinary force” within society:

If peace is to be attained in this new millennium, the human community must acknowledge its spiritual potential and recognize that it is within our power to eradicate the worst form of human brutality -war -as well as one of the root causes of war -poverty. The time is ripe for the world’s spiritual leadership to work more closely with the United Nations in its effort to address the pressing needs of humankind.¹³

The goals of this summit were to produce a statement that could inform the Millennium Summit, to build “unprecedented collaboration among leaders of the world’s diverse faith traditions who will commit to cooperate in building peaceful societies,” and—with a view to ongoing participation in the work of the UN—to form an “Advisory Council” of religious leaders to support the UN in its work of peace.¹⁴ These goals were met, and a further initiative emerged, namely, an agreement of women delegates to form their own international religious council to ensure equal representation and participation in future plans and actions of the summit.¹⁵

The declaration is short and concise.¹⁶ A preamble, which takes up half of the declaration, draws together the common vision of the role and place of faith and religious leadership in the search for peace. This leads to eleven specific commitments, among them, to mention a few, to collaborate with the UN, to condemn all violence committed in the name of religion, to promote the equitable distribution of wealth, to promote environmental protection and restoration, and to work for the abolition of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

The Millennium Summit

World leaders were invited to the special Millennium Summit at the start of the Millennium Assembly, the 55th of the UN, on 6 to 8 September 2000. They took up this opportunity with few exceptions so that 149 leaders and 38 representatives from 187

Member States were present. The Summit included five key elements. In the first, each leader had a chance to address the plenary for five minutes.¹⁷ The content of these addresses touched generally on the key issues covered by the Millennium Report, though a number of leaders took the chance to raise key national or regional concerns. The second element involved four roundtable meetings. These were staggered throughout the three-day Summit, and were open to all leaders, and provided a behind-the-scenes opportunity for frank and open discussions. These dealt with the challenges of globalization, poverty, disease, violence, transformation of the UN and the Security Council, and the lack of democracy and human rights in many parts of the world.¹⁸ It is hard to believe that this was the first time this kind of discussion has happened in 55 years at the UN, and it seems to have been a success.

The third element of the Summit was the meeting of the Security Council at the heads of state and government level on the afternoon of 7 September.¹⁹ This meeting produced a declaration “on ensuring an effective role for the Security Council in the maintenance of international peace and security, particularly in Africa.” The Copuncil ignored a key issue raised throughout the Millennium process, namely reform of the Security Council. The fourth key element was the opportunity taken by the UN itself to invite government leaders present in New York to ratify treaties and other legal instruments promoted by the UN, dealing with human rights, disarmaments, the environment, and international criminal law.²⁰ The fifth and final element of the Summit was the adoption of the *United Nations Millennium Declaration* at the conclusion of the Millennium Summit.²¹ This drew together the pre-Summit consultations, the Millennium Report, the plenary presentations, and the four round-table discussions in a nine-page document, Resolution 55/2. It was modeled quite extensively on the final section of the report, though some interesting changes did emerge.

The Millennium Declaration²²

After a preamble that lays out the key concerns of the Millennium Summit, and voices continued support for the UN, the report immediately raises up concerns about globalization: “We believe that the central challenge we face today is to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for all the world’s people” (Para 5). The paragraph calls for “policies and measures, at the global level” to combat the inequalities created by globalization based on six “fundamental values”: freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, and shared responsibility (p. 6).

The Declaration then goes to the theme of “Peace, security and disarmament” (pp. 8–10). Issues dealt with here include international terrorism, the world drug problem, transnational crime, the effects of economic sanctions on innocent populations, weapons of mass destruction, illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons, and anti-personnel mines. The capacity of the UN itself to monitor and police conflict was also addressed. The second theme, “Development and poverty eradication,” then follows (pp. 11–20). The major concern of this section is to articulate and support changes that would “free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently

subjected" (p. II). These changes include good governance within each country, and "transparency in the financial, monetary and trading systems" at an international level. Debt relief and "more generous development assistance" are called for, and attention is drawn to the special needs of both small island developing states and landlocked developing nations (pp. 15–18). In a very clear manner a range of actions are resolved with measurable outcomes to do with income, hunger, safe drinking water, primary schooling, maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS, and slum dwellers (p. 19).

The third major section of the Millennium Report deals with the environment, and this is echoed in the Declaration with the next theme: "Protecting our common environment" (pp. 21–3). The declaration calls for support for the principles of Agenda 21, the report accepted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (p. 22), and calls on nations to undertake "a new ethic of conservation and stewardship" (p. 23) with special reference to the Kyoto Protocol concerning greenhouse gases, the unsustainable exploitation of forests and water, the Conventions on Biological Diversity and Desertification, the human genome sequence, and the number and effects of natural and man-made disasters.

The Declaration then moves to three sections that have been added to those raised by the Secretary-General's report, namely, "Human rights, democracy and good governance" (pp. 24, 25), "Protecting the vulnerable" (p. 26) and "Meeting the special needs of Africa" (pp. 27, 28). A close reading of the Report, and issues raised in the various pre-Summit consultations and within the Summit itself indicates that these concerns were important enough to warrant specific mention. The section on human rights draws attention to a range of issues including the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,²³ migrant workers, racism and xenophobia, and the freedom of the media. The section on protection for the vulnerable raises concerns about the protection of civilians in emergencies, refugees and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.²⁴ The section on Africa deals with measures that "will support the consolidation of democracy in Africa and assist Africans in their struggle for lasting peace, poverty eradication, and sustainable development, thereby bringing Africa into the mainstream of the world economy" (p. 27).

The final section of the declaration, "Strengthening the United Nations," seeks to make the UN a "more effective instrument" to pursue the rest of the priorities. The central position of the General Assembly is affirmed, while "a comprehensive reform of the Security Council in all its aspects" is called for. Reference is made to the Economic and Social Council, the International Court of Justice, and other organs of the UN; a call is made for better "policy coherence and better cooperation" between the UN, the Bretton Woods Institutions (i.e. the IMF and the World Bank) and the World Trade Organization, and there is a recognition of a need for greater opportunities for the private sector, NGOs, and civil society to be involved in the realization of the goals and programs of the UN. The report concludes with a solemn reaffirmation:

The United Nations is the indispensable common house of the entire family, through which we will seek to realize our universal aspirations for peace, cooperation and development. We therefore pledge our unstinting support for these common objectives and our determination to achieve them. (p. 32)

Reflection on Some Key Themes and Issues

Whilst it is clearly difficult to reflect on a process and set of documents that very few readers will have had full access to, it is nevertheless important at this juncture to reflect on some key issues that concern both the UN and the church in South Africa, namely politics, Africa, women and gender, the environment, and the possibilities of development.

On the Role and Place of Politics

Perhaps the theme of the entire Millennium process that we can best affirm is the way it deals with the role and place of politics in the world community at the start of the new millennium. Two clear aspects stand out here. The first has to do with political control of the economy, a theme that emerges in many and different ways. It finds its clearest expression in the debates around globalization, because by and large, this is a process that is being driven by unbridled economic forces. In the Millennium documents and discussions, globalization is taken as a reality that cannot be wished away, and attention is repeatedly drawn to the brutally negative impact globalization has upon people. The documents call on the UN and national governments to take political control (through laws and taxes) of the global economy, and use it for enhancement rather than the destruction of human and planetary life. This emerged at the African Regional Consultation,²⁵ The Millennium Forum of civil society organizations,²⁶ The Millennium Report of the Secretary General²⁷ and finds expression in paragraph 5 of the Declaration itself.²⁸ Perhaps the clearest articulation of this comes from world leaders themselves in their addresses to the plenary of the General Assembly:

Andres Pastrana, President of Colombia: It is our duty to foster the conditions whereby globalization can be controlled and fair. *Antonio Guterres, Prime Minister of Portugal:* To regulate the globalization of markets is one of the core objectives at the turn of the millennium.

Wim Kok, Prime Minister of the Netherlands: Global governance needs to be strengthened to keep pace with the major challenges presented by globalization. Closing the gap between rich and poor is a task that cannot be left to the market or to individual countries.²⁹

This desire to bring the economy under the control of politics, whilst going counter to capitalist neo-liberal orthodoxy, finds fundamental agreement in the Christian faith. Theologically, politics represents the way in which human beings live out their lives as citizens of the state. In the normative sense it is the way in which people are able to articulate their hopes and dreams, seek justice and peace, and hold their leaders accountable. Economics, theologically understood, is the way that people work, produce, and sustain themselves. This is always in service to, rather than in control of, human life. When economics oversteps the mark and becomes all-controlling, it becomes Mammon. Human desire and will—expressed through political control—is the way in which the economy is held in check.

Clearly, however, politics can also overstep the mark: and become evil or even demonic, and so we are always to ask: What kind of politics? This is a particularly important question to ask of the United Nations, which is based on the concept of the Sovereignty of National States and is therefore captive to the leaders of any given country regardless of how they became leaders or maintain their leadership. It is in part answer to this question that the second aspect of the role of politics emerges in the Millennium deliberations and Declaration. This has to do with fostering democracy and wide participation in the Millennium process itself, as well as in two key concerns that are expressed about (1) the role of civil society in the UN and (2) reform of the Security Council.

The very title of the Millennium Report, "We the Peoples," makes the point that "Even though the United Nations is an organization of states, the Charter is written in the name of 'we the peoples.' Ultimately then, the United Nations exists for, and must serve, the needs and hopes of people everywhere."³⁰ This desire to be closer to "the peoples" becomes clearer in the two key proposals about the way the UN operates. The first is the desire to engage not only with governments, but also with civil society. The Millennium Report of the Secretary-General made the point that "we also need to adapt our deliberative work so that it can benefit fully from the contributions of civil society."³¹ This was echoed in the Millennium Forum of civil society organizations who called on the UN to "strengthen the United Nations' contact with citizens by providing increased resources for NGO relations offices throughout the UN system"³² and it found expression in the Millennium Declaration in which the General Assembly at the Millennium Summit resolved "to give greater opportunities to the private sector, non-governmental organizations and civil society, in general, to contribute to the realization of the Organization's goals and programmes."³³

The second proposal has to do with the reform of the Security Council, an issue that emerged at all the levels of consultation and discussion. The issue at stake here is that the Security Council reflects the power situation at the end of the Second World War, with five victorious nations being the Permanent members of the Council with the right of veto. Other than China these are all white, northern European nations and the composition no longer reflects the reality of the postcolonial world at the start of the new millennium (if it ever did). If the UN is to speak and act on behalf of "we the peoples," then the power reality within the UN itself has to reflect that participatory transparency. In the special session of the Security Council during the Millennium Summit two leaders of Permanent Member countries threw their weight behind these reforms, namely Jiang Zemin of China, and Jacques Chirac of France.³⁴ The leaders of Greece, Italy, and Venezuela all specifically made reference to the democratization of the Security Council as an issue of legitimacy for the UN.³⁵ African delegates were clear that Africa needs a place on the Security Council.³⁶ Abdelaziz Bouleflika, President of Algeria and chairperson of the fourth roundtable, noted that "while much of the work done in the Security Council involves Africa, Africa has no permanent seat."³⁷ The Millennium Declaration clearly picks up the concerns noted in the plenary, but does not go into any of the details in its resolution:

We resolve, therefore, to intensify our efforts to achieve a comprehensive reform of the Security Council in all its aspects.³⁸

From a theological perspective that takes seriously the equality of all people and of all cultures and countries in the world, and that seeks to take seriously the stated concern of the Declaration to provide political control of globalization, however, it seems strange that only one leader at the Summit (Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic) raised a critique of the very principle of having permanent members of the Security Council, or of giving them the power of the veto. Yet it would seem that in these two aspects of the Council lies the origin of much of the power imbalance in the UN as well as in global politics. It is not surprising then that these two issues do receive attention in the Declaration of the Millennium Forum of civil-society organizations.³⁹

On Africa

Africa receives serious and sustained attention as a priority issue for the UN. In the Millennium Report, a section in the chapter "Freedom from want" is dedicated to Africa: reference is made to its poverty and infrastructural inadequacies, and attention is drawn to both the economic and political obstacles to economic growth. A trend emerges in this report and is picked up often in the process, that two things need to happen in Africa to address the situation, namely (1) *international assistance*: the world and UN must be of help and (2) *self-help*: Africa has got to get its own house in order.⁴⁰ The African regional consultation in Addis Ababa in June 1999 obviously dealt at great length with the concerns of Africa, and many of these issues would have been fed into the larger process. The twin strategy of international assistance and self-help is voiced:

African countries feel marginalized in many respects because they have not received the requisite solidarity and cooperation from the international community within the context of the United Nations to enable them to overcome the continent's myriad problems. (p. 6) . . . the international community will only be interested in addressing these issues if African countries are seen to be taking the necessary actions to help themselves . . . (p. 27)⁴¹

As can be imagined, the special concerns of Africa were given attention by many of the African speakers during the plenary of the Summit, and they too spoke of this dual concern of international assistance and self-help. The special meeting of the Security Council drew these concerns into its special resolution "on ensuring an effective role for the Security Council in the maintenance of international peace and security, *particularly in Africa*." The resolution itself "in view of the particular needs of Africa" reaffirms the determination of the Security Council "to give special attention to the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, and to the specific characteristics of African conflicts."⁴²

These concerns find their climax in the special section in the Millennium Declaration "Meeting the special needs of Africa" in which the UN resolves a range of actions to do with supporting democracy, sustaining political stability, debt cancellation and development assistance, and HIV/AIDS in Africa.⁴³ This is to fulfill its stated concern:

We will support the consolidation of democracy in Africa and assist Africans in their struggle for lasting peace, poverty eradication, and sustainable development, thereby bringing Africa into the mainstream of the world economy.

This twin strategy of international assistance and self-help seems to be a realistic approach to the development needs of Africa at the start of the new millennium, and presents a clear approach for the church in development. Clearly Africa needs to be responsible for its own social and economic development and needs to get beyond “playing the victim” in the international arena. The role of the church in fostering self-confidence and self-reliance is vital. And yet, in terms of colonialism and neo-colonialism, Africa is a victim and *continues to be* victimized by globalization. Clearly a prophetic task remains for the church, with a strong advocacy role with regards to the issues of the world economy and political arrangements.”

On Women and Gender in Development

While the Millennium Assembly process receives our support for the manner in which it dealt with Africa, the same cannot be said for its approach to women and gender in development. A little bit of background is necessary here. One of the most damning and sustained critiques of international development practice over the past three decades has been its neglect of women and their needs. In initial programs and projects, they were simply invisible, because anything that benefited poor people in general would obviously benefit women. Yet, this was shown to not be the case. Due to power dynamics governed by gender relations in beneficiary countries and communities, what benefits poor men does not necessarily benefit poor women and in fact can make their lot worse. International development programs then responded to these criticisms by tacking on a specific focus on women such as sewing, baking, or food gardens. Yet, this too, did not seem to make any difference for women. What was discovered was that simply adding women to the already existing development equation assumed that the existing development paradigm was appropriate. And this assumption has been extensively contested and demonstrated to be false. In the light of this, Christians should have no trouble in supporting the contention that any development vision that seeks to speak to more than half of the world’s poor people, i.e. women, should build on the gains of those who take women and gender relations seriously in development.

However, this approach to women and gender in development does not receive attention within the broader Millennium Assembly process. There is some reference to the concerns of women and gender in development in the Millennium Report. In the focus on poverty, it makes the comment that “another major source of income inequality within countries is gender discrimination in wages, property rights, and access to education.” However, this is immediately glossed over by reference to that fact that “globalization, on the whole, may be having some positive effects.” The section deals with women purely as economic statistics, negating the role of culture and values in seeing a purely economic determinism to such issues as marriage, fertility, and the perceived “social value” of a female child,⁴⁴ with comments like “short-changing girls is not only

a matter of gender discrimination; it is bad economics and bad social policy.”⁴⁵ Women do receive attention again in relationship to “protecting the vulnerable” in situations of conflict, but on the whole they are rather invisible throughout the report. This absence continues in the Assembly itself, where there are very few references to the relationship between development, women, and gender, and none of them substantive. It is no surprise then, that we search the Millennium Declaration in vain for an adequate statement on these issues, but have to be satisfied in the end with only one small sub-resolution: “To promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable.”⁴⁶

An alternative vision is articulated in the Millennium Forum of civil society organizations. Probably reflecting a much higher representation of women in the Forum, the declaration has a consistent approach to gender throughout its agenda for action. This comes out in a specific call on governments “to develop gender based methodologies to address the feminization of poverty and to recognize the leading role of women in eradicating poverty, as outlined in the declaration of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.”⁴⁷ In one of the key sections in the report on Human Rights, attention is given to “Promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls,” and the United Nations, governments, and civil society are called upon “to recognize and assure equal opportunity and full participation of women in all aspects of society, including leadership, the economy, and decision making.” Some very concrete and specific strategies are promoted.

On the Earth and the Environment

In the first lists of possible themes and topics for the Millennium Assembly process, the environment and ecological concerns do not figure at all, other than under the solitary reference to the rather vague rubric of “sustainable development.”⁴⁸ This silence is continued in the report of the African consultation, in which the term “sustainable development” is now clearly ripped out of the environmental context in which it was coined and used to mean not development that can sustain the earth but rather development that itself will be sustained for growth and prosperity. Thus the first major concern of this report, “the challenge of sustainable development,” has not a single reference to the environment.⁴⁹

Thankfully, this silence was overcome by the time the Secretary-General’s Millennium Report was published, for here he includes an entire chapter on the environmental and ecological challenges facing the world in the new millennium. He makes the point that whereas when the UN was launched in 1945 the concern was to provide freedom from want and freedom from fear:

In 1945, they could not have anticipated, however, the urgent need we face today to realize yet a third: the freedom of future generations to sustain their lives on this planet. . . . we are degrading, and in some cases destroying the ability of the environment to continue providing these life-sustaining services for us.⁵⁰

This chapter provides important information and insight into some key environmental issues, like climate change, the water crisis, the soil crisis, preserving forests, fisheries and biodiversity. In stark contrast to the issue of women and gender in development, the environment commanded attention in the speeches to the Millennium Assembly. Many leaders identified it as a key issue in the midst of a long litany of development concerns, but perhaps the most strident voices raised were those from small island states in the Pacific who already experience the devastating impact of climate change and global warming. Nations like Kiribati, Palau, Naru, and Papua New Guinea echoed the views of Panapasi Nelesone of Tuvalu:

... the consequences of global warming and climate change are also of great concern to Tuvalu. In accordance with the spirit of the Kyoto Protocol, Tuvalu therefore urges Member States to take heed of the pleas from small island States to combat these threats more aggressively, before it is too late.⁵¹

Given all of this it is not surprising that one of the key sections of the Millennium Declaration is "Protecting our common environment."⁵² It reaffirms the principles of sustainable development, particularly those set out in Agenda 21, adopted in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and calls for the "entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol" on greenhouse gasses and global warming. A range of other resolutions is taken which have as their goal the sustainability of the planet for the next generation.

Christians would want to support the clear and direct attention given to the environment, in a similar way to those attending the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders who devoted two of their eleven resolutions (7 and 8) to the environment and ecological issues.⁵³ Yet at the same time, we need to be attentive to a deeper crisis. We are alerted to this by a very realistic note of caution that is sounded by the Millennium Forum of representatives of civil society. They note that eight years after the adoption of the Agenda 21 at the Rio conference, "there is a feeling of frustration by civil society over the slow progress or non-implementation of commitments by national and international bodies." The Declaration goes on to say:

The dominant patterns of production and consumption are being globalized, causing more environmental devastation of life-supporting ecosystems and massive loss of biodiversity ... Currently, globalization is giving priority to economic development at the expense of social development and ecological conservation. The effects of such unsustainable development has marginalized and impoverished many, including the owners and custodians of traditional knowledge and bio-diversity, indigenous peoples, older persons, farmers and women.⁵⁴

As with the relationship between gender and development, the question it would seem is deeper than just tacking on "the environment" to existing schemes of development, a sort of *green globalism*.⁵⁵ The issue would seem to point us to question whether these existing schemes are not fundamentally opposed to concern for the environment. If development is allied to economic progress and growth—as it undoubtedly is in the popular mind and amongst most of those involved in the Millennium Assembly

process—then it is directly related to increased production and consumption. The simple point is that the earth cannot sustain current levels of production and consumption, thus raising a fundamental critique of any scheme of development that is based on limitless economic growth. The crisis, as Rasmussen convincingly argues, is not really an environmental crisis, but a crisis of culture. “More precisely, the crisis is that now-globalizing culture *in* nature and wholly *of* nature runs full grain against it,” he writes. “It is not the ‘environment’ that is unsustainable. It is a much more inclusive reality, something like life-as-we-have-come-to-know-it.”⁵⁶ In all of the documentation to do with the Millennium Assembly process this point only seems to be made once in a sub-resolution of the Millennium Forum Declaration calling upon civil society:

To actively promote the awareness of the fact that once basic needs have been met, human development is about being more not having more. Fundamental changes in human values are the best means to transform the culture of consumerism.⁵⁷

On the Possibilities of Development

The concerns we have expressed over the invisibility of women and gender in the Millennium Assembly, Report and Declaration, as well as the deep tension we have just highlighted between economic growth, production, and consumption on the one hand and ecological integrity on the other, do point us to the very meaning of development itself. These concerns need to be taken seriously by the church and Christians in southern Africa before they plunge headlong into “development,” and become captives to a whole set of questionable ideas and practices. We need to engage in our own post-development thinking. This is not the occasion to develop a sustained argument on this matter, other than to note a few important matters that need fuller reflection.

Firstly, development does not have a good track record. Huge investments in time, money, and personnel have been made in “development” and yet, as the report itself makes clear, the gap between the rich and poor continues to increase. Some, such as Gilbert Rist, see this as the very meaning of development—a “global faith” that is used as a cover for neo-colonialism and capitalist growth in the global market.⁵⁸ The point being, that development strategy cannot possibly be the solution to the world’s problems because they are so much part of the problem. Even a cursory reading of the history of development would make clear that the evidence for this is overwhelming, and this has led many to proclaim “the end of development,” and to begin to speak in many and diverse ways about “post-development.”⁵⁹ These concerns are not reflected in any way in the Millennium Assembly process or Declaration.

Secondly, it is clear that the whole philosophy of development is rooted in western notions of linear time, progress, and growth.⁶⁰ The roots for this lie in the impact of Augustinian conceptions of universal history on the Roman Catholic Church and thus the world-view of the west; but also in the Enlightenment split between history and nature. Whereas nature concerns things, history concerns people. This split is vital in the development of western thinking because it establishes the sciences—like biology, zoology, medicine, astronomy—on the one side, and the people, politics, and economics

that make history on the other. This “historical consciousness” gives to humanity a great confidence to change things, and sets in motion the political ideals of the French Revolution, American Revolution, British Liberalism, and Marxism. It is a supreme belief in the possibility of humanity to “make history” on the stage of nature. The evolutionary notions of underdeveloped-developing-developed nations (like the Marxist set of feudalism capitalism-socialism) are all built on this Enlightenment framework, and so participate in the fundamental distinction between history and nature. The question is, given this background, whether development discourse itself can be of any help in dealing with what is the growing earth crisis.

Third, our concerns about women and gender in development should raise for us the question of the beneficiaries of development, and this in turn should lead us to consider the local impact of development. Gross National Products and other development statistics often fail to capture this adequately and yet if development does not make a difference for poor women and children it is not doing what it should be doing. It is clearly difficult for an institution like the United Nations or for national governments to be always concerned about local development initiatives when they are charged with the legal and institutional frameworks for wider policy. And yet they should be attentive to the fact that development is not something that comes “from above,” but rather finds its deepest meaning in initiatives that emerge “from below,” and that give confidence and courage to the marginalized. This would seem to be the vision of another kind of development promoted through thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi, Julius Nyerere, Paulo Freire, and Steve Biko. This is a process of development in which the marginalized seek to become subjects of their own history rather than objects of someone else’s story. The concern is that the Millennium Assembly process and Declaration seem embedded in the “top down” approach. Amartya Sen in his *Development as Freedom*⁶¹ draws our attention to this problem with his use of the distinction between “the patient” and “the agent”:

The ends and means of development call for placing the perspective of freedom at the center of the stage. The people have to be seen, in this perspective, as being actively involved—given the opportunity—in shaping their own destiny, and not just as passive recipients of the fruits of cunning development programmes.⁶²

Fourthly, then, we must think a little about “the right to development.” This phrase emerges strongly in the Declaration of the Millennium Forum, which considers this right “an inalienable human right and an integral part of fundamental human freedoms”⁶³ and is incorporated into the Millennium Declaration in paragraph 11. The phrase sounds good, but upon closer inspection, it turns development into an object that is good in itself, rather than recognizing it as a process that leads to other goods like justice, water, and health care. Furthermore, by making development a “right,” it becomes something that can be given and taken away by those in authority, a view which seems to suggest that development comes from the top. Clearly, the UN has to operate at a global level, and must be tasked with the political responsibility of ensuring that the economic system works to the benefit of all, and especially the vulnerable in society. Nevertheless, for the UN and national governments to abrogate to themselves

alone the meaning and task of development, or for local communities to abdicate their responsibility for their own development, would seem to be foolhardy. If we are to persist with this strange phrase, then perhaps we must add to it "the responsibility for development" a task that also befalls all of humanity.

For development is really a responsibility for those who are treated as objects, that they may become the subjects of history:

The oppressed only begin to develop when, surmounting the contradiction in which they are caught, they become "beings for themselves." If we consider society as a being, it is obvious that only a society which is a "being for itself" can develop.⁶⁴

That, in the end, is perhaps the kind of development that the church in South Africa should be fostering at this moment in our history.

Notes

- 1 See B. Pityana and C. Villa-Vicencio, eds. *Being Church in South Africa Today*. (Johannesburg, SAAC, 1995) 164 ff).
- 2 UN A/52/850 of March 1998.
- 3 85 people attended, representing thirty-six countries in Africa (thought not South Africa), with panelists from various development agencies, NGOs, the private sector, the UN, and observers from Indonesia, Ireland, Kuwait, Turkey, and the Holy See.
- 4 UN A/54/1281 of 4 October 1999.
- 5 UN A/53/948 Add I of I May 1999.
- 6 <www.un.org/millenniumlsg/report>
- 7 By civil society I refer to those social formations that are not primarily political or economic in nature such as religious, educational, cultural or environmental organizations, with NGOs and religious bodies being the most organized sectors.
- 8 <www.rnillenniumforum.org/html/mfobjecL.html>
- 9 Such as The Hague Appeal for Peace. The 1999 Seoul International Conference of NGOs and the World Civil Society Conference in Montreal.
- 10 <www.rnillenniumforum.org/htrnl/paperslmfd26May.htm>
- 11 <www.rnillenniumpeacesumrnitorg>
- 12 <www.millenniumpeacesummit.org>
- 13 <www.rnillenniumpeacesumrnit.org/about3.hlrnl>
- 14 <www.millenniwnpeacesuJllrnitorg/news0008:~9.htm>
- 15 <www.millenniwnpeacesumrnitorg/news0008Jl.htm>
- 16 <www.millenniumpeacesumrnit.org/declaratio.html>
- 17 See UN Press Release GN975 I of 6 September 2000; Press Release Sc/69 19 of 7 September 2000; and Press Release GN975 3 of 7 September 2000; and Press Release GN975 7 of 8 September 2000.
- 18 UN Press Briefings (No number) of 6, 7 and 8 September 2000,
- 19 The countries represented in the Security Council are the Permanent members, China, France, Great Britain, the United States and Russia; and then Argentina, China, Namibia, Tunisia, Ukraine, Bangladesh, Canada, Jamaica, Netherlands, Mali, and Malaysia.

- 20 UN Press Release (No number) of 5 September 2000.
- 21 UN Press Release GA/9758 of 8 September 2000.
- 22 UN This is available at <www.un.org/millenniumdeclaration/ares552e.pdf> or
<www.un.org/millenniumdeclaration/ares552e.htm>
- 23 This is UN Resolution 34/180. annex. 25
- 24 This is UN Resolution 44/125. annex_
- 25 <www.un.org/millenniumregionalhearings/reports/a_54_281.htm> paragraph II.
- 26 <www.millenniumforum.org/html/papers/mfd26May.htm>
- 27 <www.un.org/millenniumsglreport>
- 28 <www.un.org/millenniumdeclaration/ares552e.pdf>
- 29 UN Press Release GN9751 of 6 September 2000.
- 30 <www.un.org/millenniumsglreport>
- 31 <www.un.org/millenniumsglreport>69
- 32 <www.millenniumforum.org/html/papers/mfd26May.htm>
- 33 <www.un.org/millenniumdeclaration/ares552e.pdf> paragraph 30.
- 34 UN Press Release SC/69 J9 of 7 September 2000.
- 35 UN Press Release G N9753 of 7 September 2000.
- 36 See the comments of Gnassingbe Eyadema, President of Togo in UN Press Release GN9753 of 7 September 2000.
- 37 UN Press Release GN9758 of 8 September 2000.
- 38 <www.un.org/millenniumdeclaration/ares552e.pdf> paragraph 30].
- 39 <www.millenniumforum.org/html/papers/mfd26May.htm>
- 40 <www.un.org/millenniumsglreport> 31.
- 41 The report of the hearing for the Africa region. www.un.org/millenniumregional_hearing/rep01a_54_281.htm
- 42 The resolution is contained in UN Press Release SC/69 J9 of 7 September 2000.
- 43 See paragraphs 27 and 28 of the Millennium Declaration.
- 44 <www.un.org/millenniumsglreport>22.
- 45 <www.un.org/millenniumsglreport>1>24.
- 46 See paragraph 20 of the Millennium Declaration.
- 47 <www.millenniumforum.org/html/papers/mfd26May.htm>
- 48 <www.un.org/millenniumdocuments/la_53_948.htm>
- 49 <www.un.org/millenniumregional_hearing/rep01a_54_281.htm>
- 50 <www.un.org/millenniumsglreport> 55.
- 51 UN Press Release, GN9758 of 8 September 2000.
- 52 Millennium Declaration. paragraph 21.
- 53 <www.millenniumpeacesummit.org/declaration.htm>
- 54 <www.millenniumforum.org/html/papers/mfd26May.htm>
- 55 See the excellent discussion on this whole issue from a theological point of view in L. Rasmussen. *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997). The particular reference is top of 28 ff.
- 56 Rasmussen, *Earth Community*, p. 7.
- 57 <www.millenniumforum.org/html/papers/mfd26May.htm>
- 58 G. Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (London: Zed Books, 1997).
- 59 See the range of contributions to M. Rahnema and V. Bawtree (eds.), *The Post-Development Reader* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1997).

- 60 The point is made throughout Rist's book *op. cit.*, as well as in T. Shanin, "The idea of progress" in Rahnema and Bawtree. *The Post-Development Reader*, 65–72ff.
- 61 A. Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Random House, 1999), 11.
- 62 Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 53.
- 63 <www.milenniumforum.org/html/papers/mfd26May.htm>
- 64 P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1996), 142.

CHAPTER 34

Religion, Media, and Conflict in Africa

Rosalind I.J. Hackett

We are currently enjoying a long overdue boom in scholarship on religion, media, and culture (see, for example, Hoover, 2006; Hoover and Clark, 2002; Hoover and Lundby, 1997).¹ Research on Africa by African and Africanist scholars (mainly anthropologists and scholars of religion) is beginning to bear fruit and feature in international publications (see, e.g., Larkin, 2008; Ihejirika, 2006; Meyer, 2006; Hirschkind, 2006; Schulz, 2006; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005; Haron, 2004; Ukah, 2003b; Hackett, 1998, 2003, 2006, 2010fc). Despite the reluctance in communications departments in African universities to engage religious media as an area of academic inquiry, some religious studies departments and theological institutions are beginning to develop courses in this area. The reasons for this development are patently obvious to anyone familiar with the African context—the airwaves are alive with religion of one form or another. In fact, some media outlets are even dependent on the revenue from religious broadcasting to stay alive.

In this essay, I argue that there has been a lack of attention paid to issues of conflict in this emergent research on the intersections of religion, media, and culture, specifically in Africa but also in the field more generally. Conversely, the religious factor is absent from recent publications that investigate the relationship between media and conflict in Africa (notably following the Rwandan genocide) (Frère, 2007; Frohardt, 2003; Onadipe and Lord, 1999; Article 19, 1996). Instead, I propose that Africa's new media revolution is replicating, if not intensifying, old polarities, as well as generating new forms of religious intolerance and conflict. The religious pluralism and religious freedom vaunted by many governments is not necessarily borne out in terms of current patterns of media ownership, access, programming, and transmission. Given the limitations of space, I can here only sketch out some of my ideas on these questions—and primarily in relation to broadcast media.

I appreciate that my somewhat negative angle on the efflorescence of modern media technologies across contemporary Africa may appear counter-intuitive in light of more

optimistic notions of modernization, globalization, and free markets. However, I want to shed light on the less equitable side of the rapid deregulation of the media, in particular the rising Christianization—or rather Pentecostalization and Evangelicalization in many parts of Africa—of the airwaves.² As one would expect, the deleterious effects vary in terms of context and intentionality. Following the move away from earlier scholarship on media imperialism and fatalism, that viewed consumers as primarily victims, there is now more persuasive research on mass-media effects (Preiss et al., 2006). Moreover, human rights experts have cogently demonstrated how the failure to respect the precarious rights relating to freedom of expression and freedom of religion and belief can provide a warrant for broader discrimination and, potentially, conflict and violence (see Boyle, 1992). As the media proliferate and pervade everyday life, it is not surprising that they are seen as responsible for influencing, if not generating, these new patterns of religious and cultural intolerance.

As a scholar of religion in Africa, I am struck by how the mass media in Africa represent an increasingly significant interface for negotiating the power relations among and within religious groups, and between religious groups and the state. Stewart Hoover, one of the leading thinkers in the field of religion and media, reminds us of the “double articulation of the media” in that they are both shapers and products of culture (Hoover, 2006:8)(see, also, Williams, 1974; Silverstone, 1981). Wishing to emphasize this paradoxical angle, I contend that a focus on the interplay between media, religion, and conflict can prove instructive in a number of ways. Exploring this nexus can shed important light on changing processes of identity construction in Africa’s rapidly changing public spheres, and the capacity of modern media to constitute new communities and publics (on Egypt, see Hirschkind, 2006), and new senses of self and other.³ Moreover, it can take us to the heart of what broadcasting law expert Monroe Price calls the new “market for loyalties” and its attendant conflicts (Price, 1994; see also, 2002). It is noteworthy that religious identities often trump ethnicity in the quest for public recognition in mass-mediated public spheres—pointing to the new sites, symbols, and strategies which must be investigated in seeking to understand inter- and intra-communal tensions.⁴ As many post-colonial African states face new challenges in managing religious diversification and pluralization, it becomes increasingly germane to recognize the salience of the media in mediating the complex hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces, and social and discursive processes that shape religious coexistence. This particular focus can supply what has been termed “clues to conflict” (Frohardt and Temin, 2003), or the flashpoints in religiously competitive contexts.

From a more long-term perspective, a new attention to the intersections of media, religion, and conflict can also open new windows onto the ways in which communities experience cumulative alienation through negative and/or under-representation and eventually resort to violence. We should look in this connection to the recent scholarship on ethnic minority media (Cottle, 2000; Browne, 2005), on mediatized conflict (Cottle, 2006), on media framing in relation to political participation (Price, 1992; Gilboa, 2002), and U.S. foreign policy (Entman, 2004), as well as perceptions of terrorism (Norris and Just, 2003). The current phase of “media effects” research can identify a significant effect of media violence on aggressive social behavior (Christensen and Wood, 2007). Finally, in considering the merits of deploying media as a central cate-

gory of analysis in religiously related conflict settings, some positive outcomes can be foreseen. If modern media are perceived to be part of the problem pertaining to cultural anxieties relating to (religious) difference, they may also be part of the solution.⁵ Arguably, this can devolve into interesting forms of engaged scholarship. Indeed, Robert White argues that normative claims have always been an inherent part of communication studies, linking it to the development of democracy, human rights, and humanitarian values (White, 2003:192). (See also Ginsberg et al., 2002; Tomaselli and Young, 2001; Husband, 2000.)

In keeping with the thrust of this special issue, I contend that Africa provides an exciting regional location for observing and understanding the types of development adumbrated above, since media liberalization has occurred relatively recently (since the early 1990s), and relatively rapidly, in most countries. It permits us to compare how state and non-state actors are negotiating this new mediatization of the public sphere. The expansion and diversification of the media sector (see, e.g. Ansah, 1994) has occurred in conjunction with, or as a consequence of, the democratization processes underway in many African states (Nyamnjoh, 2004). The dismantling of state monopolies of the broadcast and print media, and the commercializing of airtime and ownership, have radically altered the media landscape (Fardon and Furniss, 2000), with significant consequences for religious communication and practice.⁶ Yet the spirit of deregulation of late capitalism, and collusions of state and global capital, result in a “taunting mix of emancipation and limitation” according to anthropologists Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff (2004:31).

In my studies of broadcast media in Africa—which, as can be gleaned from above, are multi-disciplinary in nature in that they seek to address both institutional, programmatic, as well as audience factors—I have identified four main areas which give rise to discontent and conflict: inequitable access, encroachment, defamation, and consumerism. Under *inequitable access*, I include all the complaints about bias in media ownership, as well as production and transmission. That it takes Coptic Christians in Egypt more than five decades to be able to launch their own TV station, that in some parts of Muslim-dominated northern Nigeria, Christians have no access to airtime, particularly at the state level, while in Ghana (where no licenses are granted to religious stations), private FM stations in the Accra region stack their primetime early morning programming in favor of their predominantly (Pentecostal/Charismatic) Christian audiences with gospel music, Christian perspectives on social issues, and pastors as presenters (De Witte, 2003:177; Hackett, 1998). Then there are all the inequities over the granting of licenses or censorship that negatively impact some (usually minority) religious communities over others.

With the ever-increasing technological power of new media, many fear their growing capacities of *encroachment* and *displacement*. This can manifest as media blitzes and saturation, as penetration of previously “protected” spaces, such as national territories, neighborhoods, and homes, by electronically magnified messages of spiritual and social empowerment. It can be articulated in a discourse of displacement, as epitomized in the crusades of German Pentecostal preacher Reinhard Bonnke and his Christ for All Nations campaign to cover the African continent—from Cape to Cairo—with the blood of Jesus by the year 2000.⁷ In the increasingly market-driven media sector, carefully

drawn up allocations for religious broadcasting may be compromised by religious organizations with greater purchasing power (often the newer Pentecostal churches that are more media-oriented), whether in South Africa (Hackett, 2006a), Ghana (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005), or Nigeria (Ihejirika, 2005).

Many religious groups have long competed for followers by trying to malign or delegitimize the opposition, but the power of new media takes such discursive strategies to new heights, and greater consequences. *Defamation* and *demonization*, especially when aggressively expressed and massively circulated—as with Nigerian video-films that often portray traditional religious ways as backward, if not nefarious—can cause offense. Muslims in Uganda have complained about the lies perpetrated about Islam by Christian evangelists using the airwaves, and a Pentecostal radio station in Kenya was physically attacked in 2006 for urging Kenyans to convert to Christianity. Religious leaders whose messages are predicated on identifying, sensationalizing, and nullifying the religious other, such as Dr. O. Olukoya and his influential Pentecostal deliverance ministry, Mountain of Fire and Miracles (Meyer, 2005:303; cf. Ukah, 2003b:221),⁸ and the late South African Muslim preacher, Ahmed Deedat, whose polemics against Christianity were widely publicized and circulated in many parts of Africa (Westerlund, 2003), can now extend their influence far beyond their headquarters, whether in Lagos or Durban.

The final area I wish to address in this brief discussion of emergent areas of conflict that derive from the new aggregations of religion and media in post-colonial Africa is that of *commercialism and entertainment*. The rise of commercial media that have to appeal to the widest possible audiences and retain government approval has led to fears about the loss of public interest programming and its capacity to promote civil society values. The consumerist model also raises the specter of neo-colonialism being nurtured by multinational media, notably out of South Africa (Nyamnjoh, 2004:71; see also Nyamnjoh, 2005:51). In addition, while independent media can offer more choice they can also foster enclave-oriented programming, thereby reducing the options that religious communities have to interact with or learn about each other.

The paradoxical effects regarding the rise of new religious media that I have wished to draw attention to in this paper must be seen against the broader global debates about the paradoxes of new media developments (McChesney et al., 2005; McChesney, 2000). There is general agreement that the new world information and communication order has only enjoyed limited success to date. Many doubt that the Habermasian unfettered intermediate space for rational-critical communication has been realized (see Anderson, 2003; cf. Hendy, 2000). There are also concerns that the market approach to the broadcasting industries has not always yielded the desired outcomes in terms of balanced growth and reliable revenue. Many lament the dominance of radio and TV channels by foreign broadcasters. Writing of Latin America, Jesus Martin-Barbero contends that thinking about communication from the perspective of culture “unsettles” the “technological optimism” of some communication scholars (Martin-Barbero, 2006:44).

It is not hard to find proponents, however, of the potential for new media technologies to challenge state and corporate hegemonies (Fatoyinbo, 1999; van Binsbergen, 2004). For some, the future of broadcasting in Africa lies with low power radio broadcasting (LPFM) stations with their capacity to operate against the trend of commercial

media monopolies. Others see the potential of local cultural production, such as cartoons, music, and video-films to provide outlets for social and political critique (Nyamnjoh, 2004; Mbembe, 2001).

In the introduction to their important volume on the anthropology of media, the editors rightly argue that it is inappropriate to predicate research in this area on “oppositional logics” because of the “simultaneity of hegemonic and anti-hegemonic effects of ‘technologies of power’” (Ginsberg et al., 2002:23). Similarly, as noted by Hyden and Leslie, writing of the rise of informal media of communication in Africa in the last decade, it may well be that neither the radical conception of the media as a top-down agency nor its antithesis of the media as a bottom-up agency of empowerment is adequate to help us understand the role of media as agents of transmission of cultural and political values (Hyden and Leslie, 2002:23). So the jury is still out on these key developments, and much will depend on local media, religious, and political environments, as well as the influence of international organizations.⁹

These ambivalent discourses on the new media feed into current debates concerning appropriate or inappropriate imbrications of the media and religious expression, as well as the place of religion in, and which type of religion is best for, Africa’s changing public spheres. The secularist paradigm of many civil society and international non-governmental organizations results in little serious analysis of the intersections of religion and the rapidly transforming media sector. But clearly one cannot ignore the power of the media in whatever form. A young Muslim activist from Ibadan told me that he did not have to switch on his television to know that the media in his traditionally pluralistic city were now dominated by Christian evangelists. Similarly, who can avoid, let alone not be drawn to, Reinhard Bonnke’s Christ for All Nations juggernaut when it rolls into town, with its capacity to stage glittering crusades for hundreds of thousands of people. Many a non-Christian has gone with the flow, seeking miracles amid the catharsis and anonymity of a mega-spectacle. This may be about greater religious choice, but it is also about the rise of more exclusivist forms of religion, better equipped than ever before with their media prowess to effect changes in the social and moral landscapes of African societies.

And finally, one can only hope that the growing body of scholarship on new religious media in Africa—especially if it attends to issues relating to conflict, as I have tried to argue here—will not only stimulate new research but also redress the relative inattention to religion shown by those international organizations whose business is media training and development.¹⁰ For, as the recent BBC report on media development in Africa indicates, religious media are far from insignificant in the overall political economy of broadcasting (2006:31).

Notes

- 1 Earlier versions of this paper were aired at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, where I was a Visiting Rockefeller Fellow from 2003 to 2004, at the European Association for the Study of Religion conference in August 2005, and at the African Studies Center, Leiden in March 2007. Portions of the text appear in: “A New

- Axial Moment for the Study of Religion?" *Temenos* 42,2 (2006), 93–111. I am grateful to Dr. Rivka Ribak for critical comments on this essay.
- 2 In pointing to the emergence of a less tolerant, even at times, aggressive, religious broadcasting culture, I want to underscore that this is not in the league of the type of inflammatory, mass-mediated messages that led to genocidal cleansing in Rwanda (Gourevitch, 1998), or deadly Muslim–Christian riots in Nigeria in 1987 (Hackett, 2003; Ibrahim, 1989).
 - 3 This has been epitomized by the work of Birgit Meyer and her associates. See, e.g. the website of the Pionier research program at the University of Amsterdam: "Modern Mass Media, Religion and the Imagination of Communities" <http://www2.fmg.uva.nl/media-religion> (accessed February 21, 2009).
 - 4 In fact, in the BBC World Service 2005 survey *Who Runs Your World?* a majority of Africans put religion above any other factor, and surprisingly few identified ethnicity as the most significant factor (6%) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4246754.stm> (accessed September 16, 2005).
 - 5 Meyer and Moors emphasize the contestations and politics of difference that accompany the emergence of new, mass-mediated religious publics (2006:12).
 - 6 This is well articulated by Jon Anderson (2003) in his research on media in the Muslim world.
 - 7 <http://www.cfan.org/> (accessed May 11, 2009).
 - 8 <http://www.mountain-of-fire.com> (accessed May 11, 2009).
 - 9 The public disagreements over the launching in November 2005 of satellite television for the Coptic Christian minority in Egypt are an excellent case in point. <http://www.copts.net/detail.asp?id=813> (accessed December 20, 2005).
 - 10 See, e.g. UNESCO's "Communication Training in Africa: Model Curricula" http://www.unesco.org/webworld/publications/com_training_en.pdf (accessed May 11, 2009); UNESCO's programs on "Media in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations," http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=22225&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=465.html (accessed May 11, 2009); OneWorld Africa <http://radioafrica.oneworld.net> (accessed May 11, 2009); Panos Institute's "Pluralist Media for Peace and Democracy" <http://www.panosparis.org/gb/pluralisme.php> (accessed May 11, 2009).

CHAPTER 35

Gospel Music in Africa

Damaris Seleina Parsitau

Introduction

Gospel and Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) is the fastest growing musical expression in many parts of Africa today. The gospel music industry has become a very lucrative commercial venture in several African countries. While religious music has been around for a very long time, the growth has taken place within the last four decades in African countries where Christianity, especially Pentecostal and Charismatic church movements, have grown. The chapter examines the growth of gospel music in Kenya and the rise of CCM out of the success of gospel music. This essay is based on ethnographic research carried out since, 2006 into the gospel music scene and recent developments in the gospel music industry. My research involved participant observation of music performances, interviews with artists and other stakeholders. Ethnographic research offered me an opportunity to follow new styles, performances, and the lyrics, which indicate that CCM is emerging as a super genre of music fusing local and international styles. I also focus on the nexus between the sacred and the profane and argue that CCM has provided Kenyan youth with a springboard onto a new platform where they have brought creativity into contemporary spiritual experience. At the same time, CCM has significantly redefined Christian worship and introduced new ways of being Christian.

The Genesis of Gospel Music in Kenya

Religious music is an assortment of music images and reflects one's experience of the sacred. Such music expresses religious sentiments that include devotion and adoration to religious symbols such as a Supreme Being, one's sense of place in the cosmos and community, one's obligations to others, appeals for assistance, and aspirations for

which one seeks fulfillment. Gospel music, a genre of Christian music, is an umbrella term that refers to medium of “ministration of the good news in songs” (Ojo, 1998:211, 1999). According to Ezra Chitando (2002), gospel music is “laden with Christian themes and performed by people who regard themselves as Christians with a mission to preach the word of God through music.” Common themes of most gospel music are praise, worship, and thanksgiving to God, Christ, or the Holy Spirit. Gospel music then is a tool that one uses to communicate the Christian message. Gospel and CCM in Kenya is not limited to Christians because it has become a major source of entertainment, although Christians also use gospel music for identity formation.

The decade of the, 1990s ushered in a new trend in gospel music through “praise and worship” songs performed in the newer Pentecostal and Charismatic churches that emerged in the, 1970s. These new churches popularized Christian music and gave new meaning to “praise and worship” songs that are an integral part of Pentecostal church worship services (Parsitau, 2006, 2008). These churches attracted many people and their music had a huge impact on the evolution of gospel in Africa (Chitando, 2002; Parsitau, 2006, 2008). This development intensified a new creativity in religious music and created a new religious culture whose force, gospel music, responded to popular culture, equally appealing across denominational lines as well as to the public. Although the popular dimension has expanded the reach of gospel music their lyrics differentiate them from other music. Gospel music may share instrumentations and stylistic features with other popular secular music; it still maintains its identity as Christian music. CCM has not only emerged from the growth of gospel music as a new expression of worship but also as a rich expression of worship, faith, theology, creativity, and identity formation that are also reflective of general mood changes among the youth. This phenomenal growth of Christian music in Africa has inspired a great deal of academic interest. Much of this scholarship has focused on the history, growth, role, and socio-political significance of gospel music for political activism, a trend I discussed in earlier publications (Parsitau, 2006, 2008; Chitando, 2002; Ojo, 1998; Atieno, 2006; Njogu and Maupeu, 2009; Nyairo and Ogunde, 2005; Mwangi, 2006; Wa Mungai, 2007; Wa Mutonya, 2007; Lamont, 2010).

Prior to the early, 1990s, the Kenyan music scene and industry looked quite gloomy from a business point of view. Paterson (2005), argues that diminishing sales and pirating reduced the profit margin and challenged local artists and producers who lacked the powers to challenge continuous breach of copyright laws. Pirated music was (and is) sold on the streets, markets, and shops. Hawkers roam the city streets ignorant of their crime and many Kenyans buy pirated tapes because they are cheaper and as good as legal ones. Hawkers are rarely arrested and Kenyans disregard this breach of copyrighted materials. Piracy laws for a long time remained ambiguous and the Kenyan government remained indifferent to this challenge, but it has begun to formulate measures to curb the practise because it threatens to kill creativity, the music industry, and have negative effects on the Kenyan economy.

In the mid-1990s a number of factors came together that set the stage for a new dawn of growth and popularity for Kenyan music. First, deteriorating socio-political and economic life pushed people to seek new forms of entertainment that would address their social conditions. Second, Neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches who created

new praise music contributed to the growth of gospel music and brought a new ownership to gospel music. Third, the liberalization of broadcast laws in the late 1990s and early in the new millennium signaled new tidings for Kenyan musicians (Parsitau, 2006). New FM radio stations and later television stations, which employed new mass media communication technologies, professionalized the production of new local music and local artists used these new technologies. Ted Josiah emerged as a leader who, along with others, was credited for professionalizing the production and marketing of music in a way that changed and transformed gospel music.

Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity enhanced gospel music through praise, which was normally led by a worship leader backed by a team of instrumentalists, soloist, and choir. The rest of the congregation often joins the choir and soloist in the song. Sometimes a worship leader directs the congregation in general singing. The praise and worship sessions are a pivotal aspect of worship that sets the mood for the entire service. The praise and worship session attracts many people who long for entertainment. It can also determine if the pews are filled or half empty at any given church service. This music is current and reflects global Pentecostal music and religious experience (Gifford, 1998:146). Being the locus of gospel music, Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches act as training grounds or a laboratory for musicians.

Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Kenya account for the highest number of gospel musicians. Some secular artists have crossed over to produce gospel music (Parsitau, 2006, 2008). Several famous artists in Nairobi have crossed from pop to gospel and some dabble in both gospel and secular music. Joseph Kamaru, a pillar of Kikuyu pop since the 1960s recently disbanded his band and reformed a gospel group (Pater-son, 1995). A number of factors may also have necessitated the crossover from secular to gospel. Sometimes pop artists claim that they have had a religious transformation and become "born again" and have stopped playing or recording secular music. Others are motivated by an ingenious survival instinct since gospel music is popular, lucrative, and widely accepted by a majority of Christians and non Christians alike in a country where it is estimated that more than 80 percent of the people are Christians (Parsitau, 2006, 2008). Many continue to use gospel music as a strategic device to spread Christianity (Chitando, 2002). Gospel music has therefore flourished in a dominant Christian environment and made a mark on the country's popular culture.

At the beginning, FM radio stations had a bias towards international music especially North America styles like reggae, hip hop, rap, and R&B; but changed and gradually increased the playing of local Kenyan music. These styles appealed to the youth, and artists who performed styles inspired largely from abroad introduced local elements: language, subject matter, melody, and instruments. Within a short time, both secular and religious music ushered in a completely new set of younger artists and players who transformed gospel and the music industry. Although older artists did not go away, the new artists received greater attention. These new and younger musicians moved fast and took their music to a higher level as the radio and television stations played their music and enabled society create a bridge between religion and music.

Thirdly, the success of gospel music in Kenya also depends on the influence of African American celebrities such as Ron Kenoly, Alvin Slaughter, Don Moen, Kirk Franklin, Cece Winans, and others. These international gospel musicians have also enjoyed

celebrity status in Kenyan Pentecostal and Charismatic churches and their songs, which were well known in Kenya, been appropriated and played throughout Kenya. Kenyan Pentecostal televangelists bring new recordings when they travel to Europe and North America. Music from overseas is sold in Christian bookstores. Playing these songs on radio and television has popularized the music and church choirs have drawn from these styles. Much of the gospel music sung in Deliverance Church Nakuru and Jesus Celebration Centre (JCC) are borrowed from western artists (Parsitau, 2006; Gifford, 1998). Kenyan Pentecostal churches also adapt western music to fit local audiences. These songs were sung in English but Kenyan artists have given the music local characteristics by using Swahili lyrics. They have also composed local songs drawing from the different Kenyan musical cultures. Today, most songs are normally in English, Kiswahili, or a mixture of the two languages. Many times short choruses are sung in an assortment of different ethnic dialects, perhaps in an attempt to include and appeal to all ethnic groups that frequent these churches irrespective of ethnicity, class, or gender.

A fourth reason for the success and popularity of gospel music in Kenya is attributed to the flourishing career successes of local gospel artists such as Mary Atieno, the Kasangas, Hellen Mtawali, the Mwauras, Mrs. Jefwa, Rueben Kigame, and others. Slightly younger singers such as Joan Wairimu, Jemimah Thiong'o, Angela Chibalonza, and Naomi Nyongesa, among many others, soon followed this group of relatively older gospel artists. Others include new and much younger artists such as Esther Wahome, Neema Ntaalel, Krystin Ndela, Kanji Mbugua, Maximum Melodies, K-Krew, Roy Smith Mwatia also known as Rufftone, Daddy Owen, Emmy Kosgei, MOG, Ruth Wamuyu, Jimmy Gait, Marion Shako, and Eunice Njeri. All these artists have established flourishing careers in gospel music and made gospel music popular and as much appreciated as secular music.

Thus, an increasingly high number of gospel artists linked to various Pentecostal churches where they honed their artistic skills have emerged. For example, both Maximum Melodies Choir and Emmy Kosgei are linked to the Maximum Miracle Centres while Mbugua Kanji and K-Krew are linked to the Nairobi Chapel. During the 1990s, Pentecostal churches (Deliverance Church of Nairobi, Maximum Miracle Center, and House of Grace) nurtured their choirs carefully and their output attracted many people to join their churches. These Churches have recognized that gospel music appeals to the youth and are using it to reach out to younger generations. Other artists have developed their skills but are not linked to a specific congregation.

Gospel Music has therefore carved out a niche for itself in the Kenyan music scene to emerge as perhaps one of the most preferred types of music especially among the youth. It has also constituted a great deal of challenge to secular artists, as already attested by the fact that many secular artists today are either making a complete crossover to produce gospel music or dabble in both. Similarly, in musical charts and ratings gospel music has elbowed out secular artists to win many accolades.

From Gospel Music to Contemporary Christian Music

The second leg of the development of Christian music is the creation of Christian Contemporary Music (CCM).¹ This new musical expression differs from traditional gospel

music in both form and scope. CCM emerged in the late 1990s but gained acceptance and prominence by the dawn of the new millennium. By 2005, Contemporary Christian Music had become the preferred type of religious music especially among the youth. The distinctions are both remarkable and profound. Gospel music has traditionally included a capella hymns. The 1990s saw the dawning of an even broader scope for Christian music which included rock, rap, metal, urban gospel, country, and pop, all of which were present in Kenya in a big way. CCM Music can therefore be described as a kind of musical and spiritual renewal that has drawn from the Bible and Christian themes to appeal to a cross-section of the Christian community longing for a new spiritual experience, especially among the youth. CCM has also expanded to include a vast array of styles such as hip-hop, rock, rap, spiritual reggae, even salsa. In Kenya, CCM has incorporated many styles, beats, and dances to produce its own localized version of CCM. For example, the Congolese style of music popularly known as rumba has also infiltrated Christian music in unprecedented ways.

Local artists in a bid to find their own voices have added an array of styles and dances to produce a sort of fusion that defies definition because it brings urban styles, the funky, and rumba styles to catchy rhythms. Thus, CCM is evolving fast and while the idea of incorporating non-religious styles into Christian music is controversial to some, artists and youths have embraced the new form of music because it expresses a new type of Christianity inspired by the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches. Yet after gathering significant momentum in the late 1990s, CCM has captured the attention of the churches and general society such that its influence is felt beyond religious circles. Today, CCM is arguably one of the most widespread and influential forces in mainstream Kenyan society.

The revolution and transition from the gospel music of the 1990s to CCM is anchored on an increasingly receptive public, an interested media, and gospel musicians themselves. The Pentecostal and Charismatic Church movements coupled with mass media technologies helped popularize firstly traditional gospel music of the 1990s and later CCM at the dawn of the new millennium. During the 1990s the music of contemporary but older gospel artists such as Ron Kenoly, Don Moen, Maranatha, Donald McClurkin, Alvin Slaughter, and Lenny Leblanc were sung in most Pentecostal churches particularly during worship services (Parsitau, 2006).

African-American celebrities rose to fame, thanks to the popularity of CCM in America. Songs from labels such as Integrity Music and Maranatha Church Choirs of America formed the bulk of music sung in many Pentecostal churches. By the dawn of the new millennium, CCM by younger African American artists such as Kirk Franklin and Cece Winans became very popular with the youth in Kenya. The media once again helped popularize Contemporary Christian Music by ensuring that music by contemporary gospel artists received significant airtime.²

Locally, the "Stomp" a popular Christian musical programme aired by Nation Television (NTV) in early 2004 and featuring music by Kirk Franklin, Donnie McClurkin, and Cece Winans helped launch CCM in Kenya. It also changed local perceptions about CCM particularly among the youth who embraced it whole-heartedly because the songs appealed to people who liked funky and urban Christian music. Franklin's unique blend of preaching, interspersed with spiritually inspired rap lyrics, heralded the dawn of a new day, which saw the ascendance of CCM in Kenya and ushered it into prominence

as part of mainstream Christian music.³ By 2004 and 2005, the music of Franklin, Cece Winans, and other African American Contemporary Christian Music artists attracted many to the Christian lifestyle and church membership because it made Christian music appear cool and attractive.⁴ Between 2007 and 2010, Kirk Franklin, Donnie McClurkin, Alvin Slaughter, Ron Kenoly, and Cece Winans all performed in Nairobi at the invitation of Kenyan gospel artists and Charismatic and Evangelical churches such as Mavuno Church. Christian Rock band *Jars of Clay* also performed twice in Nairobi in 2009. The youth in many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, especially worship leaders, emulated Franklin's mode of singing, dancing, and dressing styles. Similarly, Isaac Blackman, whose gospel music has reggae influences also performed in Nairobi in 2009. Their songs receive sufficient airplay especially from Christian FM radio stations such as *Jesus Is Lord Radio*, Fish FM, Radio, 316, and Hope FM Radio. Christian TV stations such as Family TV and God TV also devote significant airtime to Contemporary Christian Music from both local and international artist.

New Pentecostal churches have made far-reaching musical adjustments in their programs to attract and retain the youth in their congregations. These churches also attracted people who think mainline churches are so "old school" and boring. Some of these churches include Mavuno church, Nairobi Lighthouse, Nairobi Pentecostal Church, Deliverance Church Umoja, Jesus Celebration Centre (JCC), among many others. These churches are youthful and put on trendy programs and contemporary music controlled by disc jockeys who mix the music so flawlessly that one might mistake the service for a night club. Incorporating contemporary musical styles and sounds has been an effective way of conveying a message of hope that encourages youths.

Contemporary Christian songs are significant in many ways: firstly, they have made CCM appear cool and desirable and secondly they appeal to the youth and the young at heart irrespective of whether they are churchd or un-churchd, representing a diverse demography that are now fans of Franklin and CCM. A significant number of Christian youth today identify with funky gospel beats rather than old hymnals. Most of the youths I interviewed in Nakuru, Nairobi, Kisumu, Eldoret, and Kericho said that the kind of music played in these churches attracted them to attend church services. But even more importantly, it inspired local gospel artists to produce their own Kenyan version of CCM.

For example, Owen Mwatia, also known as Daddy Owen, a famous contemporary gospel artist who won the 2010 MTV Africa Music Award asserted himself as the king of CCM Kenyan fashion by creating a music genre called "Kapungala." Kapungala is inspired by Kapuka—a fusion of local music, dance, and styles with Lingala—a type of Congolese and rumba type of music that is popular throughout much of East and Central Africa. His Kapungala album is a fusion of songs and melodies from various but mostly modern musical styles and genres. His hit song Tobina, a celebratory song and dance, won the 2010 MAMA Africa Music Awards. It charms thousands of youth because of the massive airplay it receives on FM radio stations.⁵ Jimmy Gait, another celebrated contemporary gospel artist, mixes both Swahili and Sheng to produce a type of Christian music that defies categorization or even definition. His hit songs, Muhathara and Huratete, are all corruptions of Swahili, sheng, and local dialects, particularly his own Kikuyu dialect.

Prior to these two songs, Maximum Melodies, a group of young artists from the Maximum Miracle Centre—a large Neo-Pentecostal church—set the stage for Kenyan CCM when they won the Groovy Award in 2004. The group exploded on the national scene with the release of its album *Mwamba* (Swahili word for Rock) in 2004. More songs and albums by Andrew Young the leader of this musical group associated with one of Kenya's huge churches (Parsitau, 2006) later followed *Mwamba*. In, 2004–2005 the group toured several countries including the USA, Britain, and South Africa at the invitation of the Kenyan Diaspora (Parsitau and Mwaura, 2010).

The group also enjoys the support of the youth for several reasons. First, the group was founded and led by young people, and continues to attract youths to the church. Secondly, its music and dance appeals to young people who enjoy their dance styles and mode of dress. Thirdly, it provides young people with space to become creative and enjoy themselves. It would therefore appear that Maximum Melodies have successfully carved out a niche for themselves not only on the local and international scene, but also set the stage for the beginning of acceptance for CCM.

Yet, while Maximum Melodies marked the beginning of a new type of musical expression and worship, the music of Esther Wahome and Jemimah Thiongo was a turning point for Kenyan CCM in 2005. The hit songs “Akisema Atakubariki” (when the time to be blessed comes) by Jemima Thiongo and “Kuna Dawa” (there is a solution in Jesus) by Esther Wahome topped charts, sold hundreds of copies, and marked the genuine acceptance of local CCM in Kenya.⁶ The public rated these highly; the songs were played repeatedly on FM radios and TVs, especially music programmes like the “Stomp” and “Music You Believe In.” These two albums achieved unprecedented crossover appeal, and were played in secular nightclubs and pubs, and were sold out from music stores in a short time. For these reasons, Esther Wahome and Jemimah Thiongo could therefore be described as the faces of CCM in Kenya.

Equally popular contemporary gospel artists were Daddy Owen, Rose Muhando, Rufftone, Rose Ohon, Men Of God (MOG), and Marion Shako. Others include Wangeci Mbogo and Emmy Kosgei. Their music leans more towards traditional styles and has won accolades for their products. There is no shortage of talent as new artists emerge, and it is challenging one artist to remain the dominant force. There is healthy competition, which keeps the artists creative.

The emergence of local and contemporary gospel artists has certainly eclipsed the popularity of African-American CCM artists such as Kirk Franklin of “Stomp” fame although they remain part of the scene. Prior to the popularity of local songs, hit songs from the “Stomp” such as “My Redeemer” and bouncy hip-hop “Shackles” by sisters Erica and Tina Atkins, ruled the airwaves and were also heavily appropriated in most Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. This changed as of 2006 as local artists gained more airtime on FM radio. The emergence and launching of several Christian FM and TV stations has therefore enhanced the popularity and success of local CCM in Kenya.

But it is not only religious stations that devote significant airtime to contemporary Christian Music. Increasingly, secular radio and TV stations devote segments to gospel music and CCM. Citizen TV dedicates more than five hours of airtime every Sunday to a CCM programme called “Rauka and Kubamba”. This programme features a famous musical youth group called K-Krew from Mavuno Church. Nation TV also features

gospel musical programmes such as “Cross Over,” “101,” and “One Voice.” KTN and Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) also feature gospel and CCM programs lasting more than three hours each Sunday. Radio and TV stations devote more airtime to Christian musical programs, a move that has popularized gospel music and ushered CCM into the public sphere.

Local gospel artists featured on secular programming sometimes top the music charts on such stations. As such, CCM and artists are slowly elbowing out their secular counterparts to win a place in the hearts of Kenyans. CCM has therefore become a craze, and might just be on the way to becoming the most listened-to genre of Christian music in Kenya today. Arguably, it is one of the most widespread and influential forces within Kenyan Christianity.

Between the Sacred and Secular: Contemporary Christian Music at the Crossroads

Following the great success of the 1990s, CCM began to transcend religious circles to find a home and place in mainstream society and its influence now reaches beyond the Christian churches because it has planted its roots in the public domain. CCM is consumed outside the church and sung on the streets, in bars and pubs, and social gatherings. It has therefore grown in popularity and significance, as one hears this genre of music played on radio, television, on the streets, shops, in bars at ear-deafening levels thanks to modern technology, and performed in the churches. But Christian music previously confined to churches and church-related events such as seminars, crusades, and revival gatherings is now sung in places not designated as sacred places or religious spaces. Gospel and CCM appeal to the church and the un-church, believers and non-believers alike. For these reasons, CCM has left the church to find a home and acceptance outside the church particularly in secular venues such as concert halls, discotheques, pubs, political rallies, and social gatherings.⁷ For example, Esther Waho-me’s hit “Kuna Dawa” (There is a solution or medicine) is as frequently heard in pubs across the country as it is in Christian churches. Her music that encompasses the cultural richness of the country, praise and worship, dance and an upbeat contemporary feel makes many people want to dance to her music (Parsitau, 2008).

The popularity Christian music has gained has influenced artists to perform in secular spaces more than they did in the past. A good example is the Mavuno Spread the Love Festival spearheaded by U.S. gospel artist Franklin. When Kirk Franklin came to Kenya in 2009, he performed at the Carnival Gardens on 12 September, a famous secular place in Nairobi.⁸ Kijiji Records and Mavuno Church organized the event.⁹ Both Donald McClurkin and Cece Winans also performed at the Bomas of Kenya, a secular venue normally reserved for secular activities and political rallies. Local artists have joined the international gospel artists and are also performing at secular venues.

A new trend in the local gospel music scene is the annual gospel bash where contemporary gospel artists organize annual festivals to showcase their talents. In, 2008–2010, for example, an annual gospel bash popularly known as Totally Sold Out (TSO) attracted hundreds of youth from Nairobi and others around the country. In 2010

gospel artists in conjunction with Flame Entertainment and Lamp Stand Records organized a Christmas party dubbed The Gospel Festival where Kenya's finest gospel artists launched a family album. The occasion that was aggressively advertised in leading newspapers, radio, and TV stations brought together Kenya's leading gospel artists such as Daddy Owen, Emmy Kosgei, the Kassangas, Ben Githae, Reuben Kigame, Kambua, and others.

Similarly on New Years' Eve 2010, the Gospel Groove Party Bonanza held at Kenyatta International Conference Centre (KICC), Kenya's premium conference venue, at an estimated cost of 20 million Kenyan Shillings (\$US 220,385) was a spectacular event. The event dubbed the Cross over Groove Party and organized by Mo Entertainment Group attracted East Africa's gospel big names such as Daddy Owen, Emmy Kosgei, Kambua Manundu, and Marion Shako. Others include M.O.G, Jimmy Gait, Maximum Melodies, and Tanzanian's songbirds Rose Muhando and Christian Shusho, and Uganda's Exodus, among many others.¹⁰ This is proof that gospel music is undergoing tremendous transformation particularly leaning strongly towards the secular, making it difficult to demarcate between Christian and secular music. However, critics point out that the holy alliance and the incredibly easy relationship between religious and secular music is problematic because there is no longer a distinct Christian music and believers and non-believers compose and sing the same songs or dabble in both types of music. This is a difficult issue to resolve because the success of religious music resides in its very capacity to integrate fashionable elements from secular and local music including style, rhythms, and orchestrations for its own purposes. Supporters of the new trend in Kenya point out that Christian music sales continue to grow and reach new audiences around the world, and it has stayed close to the driving force behind the inspiration; the message of salvation.¹¹

That CCM has attempted to supplant church music and dance in discotheques has rubbed Christian conservatives up the wrong way. This has sparked off controversies and criticisms from those who feel that CCM has lost both its direction and its purpose and is merely an entertainment and a commercial venture. They decry excessive circularization. Yet, the alliance between gospel and secular music though baffling may be understandable when one considers that the move towards some kind of fusion has been done to gain wide acceptance and survive by making the music popular. This move has captured the attention of Kenyan youth who found gospel music boring and unattractive. The changes that have taken place in gospel and CCM are unstoppable because of creativity, rivalry, the pressure of popular culture, and shifts in modern technology that has made it possible to produce a sophisticated product. The interchange of the sacred and the profane is a vibrant nexus that reiterates a new perspective in African definition of music marked by the practice of going beyond boundaries, in social contexts where there is no clear-cut demarcation between the sacred and the profane. But it could also be that the holy and seemingly easy alliance between sacred and secular music might just be a creative venture in which both types of music feed into each others' energies and synergies.

From the above analysis, it can be argued that CCM totally redefined Christian worship and introduced new ways of being Christian in a cosmopolitan environment. However, despite the criticisms, one can also appreciate the creativity and

sophistication that have been shown by Kenyan youth. The youth have not only displayed tremendous creativity but have equally changed the way church is run. CCM has also given Kenyan youth an avenue through which young people assert their rights to be seen, heard, and recognized as cultural workers in their own right (Chitando, 2002). It has given music a new meaning, function, and serves as a source of spiritual sustenance, identity building, solidarity, and a source of stability in the face of incredible helplessness, unemployment, and idleness. It equally provided the youth with a solution to their existential dilemmas and insecurities. As such, CCM has helped to integrate the youth who had felt left out of a place in mainline churches and reinvented, repackaged, and re-imaged itself in a way that captured the hearts and souls of the younger generations.

However, while mainstream Christianity is slow to embrace it and in some respect even resisting and rejecting it altogether, CCM is gaining tremendous acceptance among the youth and performing artists who believe that CCM is not only here to stay but also marks the beginning of something new and transformative. An advertisement of an event featuring CCM on New Years' Eve put it more clearly: *Representing Christ Jesus to the Fullest*. CCM artists believe that their music is meant to bring in a new experience in the way they preach Christ. This reflects a generational mood among the youth in Kenya many of whom long for a new Christian experience. As many churches wrestle with embracing CCM an increasing number of gospel artists of a new generation are emerging and will continue to transform, especially urban churches and ways of doing worship in the church and other avenues.

Gospel Music on the Loose: In the Streets and the Public Domain

In Kenya, CCM has flourished in a dominant Christian environment to make a mark in the country's public space, promoted a new religious experience, the public sphere, and become an important aspect of Kenya's socio-political discourses (Parsitau, 2008). It is now intricately interwoven with national politics and is now also frequently used to usher in or clamor for social change and reform. Snapshots of history show that Christian music in its various manifestations has played certain key roles in providing social spaces to respond to and criticize oppressive political arrangements in Kenya. During the colonial period, church music was co-opted to send messages of liberation to fellow citizens and in the process disguising the liberative space being created within the Christian social space. It was however during the clamor for social change and political reforms at the dawn of the millennium that Christian music acquired tremendous socio-political significance by meeting the appetite of the people and is now being appropriated in political processes (Parsitau, 2008). In 2002, music proved decisive when both popular secular and gospel songs such as "Yote Yawezekana" to "I am unbogable" combined to strike a blow that ended nearly four decades of Kenyan African Nation Union's (KANU) rule and misrule. Since then music and especially Gospel and CCM has assumed an increasingly prominent position in Kenya's religious, social, and political life with people using gospel music at campaign rallies and in political discourses.

During electoral and political campaigns, politicians particularly use gospel music or pick popular gospel hits and tunes and adapt them to their message in the campaigns. For example, during the 2002 election campaigns, politicians turned a popular gospel hit "All things are possible by faith" to "All things are possible without Moi." Similarly, during the 2007 general election, the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) turned the gospel number "Brethren don't sleep yet for the battle of defeating Satan is far from over" to "Kenyans don't sleep yet for the battle of removing President Kibaki from power and the war for democratic space is far from over." During the referendum debates and the clamor for a new constitution in 2005/6, the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) that opposed the government published constitutional draft heavily used and borrowed from the above mentioned song.

Therefore in the political arena, popular Christian songs acquire new meanings altogether and are used to strike a chord or evoke certain emotions among Kenyans. With a large number of people in Kenya being Christian, this strategy seems to work because it evokes sentimental feelings among Christians. In the last general elections held in 2002 and in 2007, gospel, CCM, and dance acquired new meanings, new roles, and socio-political significance. Politicians use it to mobilize voters and artists cash in during general elections by staging performances during political rallies (Nyairo, 2005).

In 2010, during the referendum campaign, gospel artists graced public campaign rallies to support or oppose the new constitution. On August 27, 2010, one of the most memorable days in the history of Kenya's post-independence history, the president promulgated the new constitution; Emmy Kosgei a leading gospel artist led the nation in celebration through her song "Taunet Ne Lal" (a New Beginning). The Groove Award winner took Uhuru Park by storm with her electrifying singing, literally dragging dignitaries and the excited crowd by storm to their feet as Kenyans celebrated the realization of the new constitution.¹² It is too early to predict the outcome of this invasion of the public sphere by Christian artists, but they are here and everyone is taking advantage of it.

Music, Money, and Fame: Religious Music and the Corporate World

But gospel artists are not only singing in state functions but are also increasingly moving into the corporate world to endorse and promote companies' products. Corporate organizations now compete for gospel artists to endorse their products. Today the corporate world, with a clean image to project and maintain, choose gospel artists to perform at the launch of new products. In 2008 for example, East African Breweries Limited (EABL), a leading beer and beverage company in East Africa, signed a three-million Shillings deal with celebrated gospel singer, Esther Wahome of the "Kuna Dawa" fame to promote its Malta Guinness brand, a non-alcoholic drink.¹³ This move attracted tremendous criticisms from conservative Christians who argued that it was unchristian for a gospel artist to endorse products by a company that specializes in alcohol, in a context where some conservative Christians consider it sinful, corrupting, and compromising for a Christian. Esther on her part ignored the barrage of criticism directed at her, arguing that she did not see how endorsing a non-alcoholic drink compromised

her faith. Rufftone, a famous gospel artist and one of the first artists who revolutionized gospel music, particularly CCM, was recently signed by an energy drink called Vita 500.

At the same time, many gospel artists have featured in East Africa's biggest reality TV music show, the Tusker Project Fame (a project aimed at nurturing talent among the youth) and jointly sponsored by East Africa Breweries Limited (EABL) and South Africa's Gallo Records. Alvin Gatitu, a former gospel artist who honed his singing and artistic skills at the Deliverance Church in Nakuru in the 1990s, participated in this famous project and rose to stardom. Other gospel artists who have featured in this famous project include 23-year-old (at the time) Alpha Rwirangira from Rwanda who competed in the Tusker Project Fame in 2009, and won the competition and took home a cash prize of five million Kenyan Shillings (\$US 55,000). Alpha is a praise and worship leader at his local church in Kigali. Christian DJs, such as DJ Krowber, won the first edition of Pilsner Mfalme Competition. Others who competed alongside their secular counterparts for major contracts and corporate sponsored concerts include Mo, Soxxy, and Riq.¹⁴

In addition to the East African Breweries Limited, Safaricom Kenya Limited, the mobile phone company and the most profitable company in East Africa, has signed multi-million dollar deals with a number of gospel artists. For example, Tanzania's superstar, Rose Muhando, of "Nibebe" fame and other top gospel artists in East Africa have raked in millions of Shillings from this company. Her hit song, "Yesu ni Bwana" (Jesus is Lord), used by the company to promote some of its products earned in thousands of Shillings. In 2010, Safaricom sponsored Muhando's Nibebe tour promoting the company's products in several towns in Kenya. Safaricom's latest advertisement features a gospel musical, with a hymn-like tune, which has become a hit ring tone in the country. Besides, mobile service subscribers can also download their favorite gospel artist's songs as their ring tones for a fee. When the late Angela Chibalonza died in a road crash in 2008, her hit song "Nimekutana Na Yesu" (I have met with Jesus) topped the charts and many born again Christians downloaded it as their preferred ring tone. Today, one can easily download a favorite gospel artist's song as a ring tones. These ring tones are advertised both on television and in the print media.

Daddy Owen, Emmy Kosgei, Marion Shoko, Kambua Maundu, Kanjii Mbugua, Jimmy Gait, Ben Githae, have all become household names and hot commodities in the corporate world. Their songs can also be downloaded as ring tones. For example, when Safaricom launched their Skiza, a ringback tune service, gospel artists were on top of the list of musicians whose music was downloaded frequently. According to data released by the Music Copyright Society of Kenya (MCSK), Tanzanian Rose Muhando's song "Yesu ni Bwana" (Jesus is Lord) was downloaded 43,648 times netting her millions of Shillings in just one month. Marion Shoko and the late Angela Chibalonza followed closely in earnings with songs "Ahadi Zake" (His Promises) and "Uliniumba Nikuabudu" (You created me to worship you) respectively.¹⁵ In this case, the nexus between gospel music and money is unveiled.¹⁶

Corporate organizations equally sponsor gospel artists whenever they hold events to showcase their talents, promote their music, or launch new albums. Safaricom, The Standard Group, Radio Maisha, Radio Citizen, Nakummatt Supermarkets, Nokia, Coca-cola, and many other leading companies in Kenya all sponsor gospel music events and performances. For example, on December 31, 2010, New Years' Eve, Kenya's leading

gospel artists held the biggest gospel bash dubbed “Groove Party” at the KICC that was sponsored by all these companies.¹⁷ Similarly, K-Krew held a Christmas bash dubbed “Totally Sold Out” at the Nairobi Chapel, which was aggressively advertised in both the print and electronic media and was sponsored by most of these companies. In 2009, the Christian Groove awards held in Nairobi attracted companies such as Safaricom, LG Electronics, and Nation Media Group through Nation TV. These developments point to the growing popularity and acceptability of gospel music which appears to have a lot of goodwill both locally and from abroad.

However, while both corporate organizations and gospel artists earn millions of Shillings by collaborating with each other, consumers continue to debate if this is the correct thing to do. Corporations like the collaboration because they want to use people with an untainted image to promote their products. Gospel artists are considered untainted and this might be one reason corporations scramble to use gospel artists. Gospel and CCM also enjoy tremendous popularity and acceptability in Kenya, something that would attract a lot of clientele for various companies. Yet, one question that seems to beg answers remains why gospel artists enthusiastically endorse corporate products despite the tremendous criticisms of such a practice? Bantu, a gospel artist, argues that it is unfair to criticize gospel artists for demanding payment to perform or endorse companies’ products because, as music production is a costly undertaking, gospel artists also need to make a living from their talents.

One reason gospel artists are shunning performing in church functions is that clergy expect them to perform free, yet the clergy themselves make millions of Shillings from preaching and running religious empires. Many gospel artists therefore see contradictions when they are expected to perform for free. As Bantu posits, even religious clergy feed from preaching, why not gospel artists? Esther Wahome too does not see anything wrong with using one’s talent to make a living because, at the end of the day, it is about serving God and putting food on the table.

There are no easy answers in this debate, but one thing is clear and that is the fact that despite myriads of criticisms, Christian music particularly CCM has evolved into something new even if a debate continues about its place outside the Christian Church. But whether or not it finds a home outside its traditional place of worship or not, it will likely continue to exist within the Christian tradition as an expression of faith just like the traditional hymns and psalms have played an important role that has shaped Christianity for a long time.

Notes

- 1 Margaret Oganda, “Are new music genres phasing out choirs?” *Saturday Standard*, 21 June 2008.
- 2 Kenfrey Kiberenge, “Contemporary Gospel Music Rises to Glory,” *Saturday*, 12 September 2009, p. 18.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 “Do you want a revolution?” *Sunday Nation Lifestyle Magazine*, 13 September 2009, p. 1. See also Tim Kamuzu Banda, “A Good Year for Kenya’s Gospel Music Industry,” *Sunday Nation Lifestyle Magazine*, 13 September, p. 2.

- 5 Shirley Genga, in an interview with Daddy Owen, *Pulse Magazine, The Standard*, Friday, 31 December 2010, p. 6.
- 6 Kenfrey Kiberenge, "Contemporary Gospel Music Rises to Glory," p. 18.
- 7 Philip Mwaniki, "Gospel with Attitude: Holy Alliance between the Spiritual and the Worldly," *Sunday Nation*, 22 February 2009, p. 5.
- 8 Emmanuel Mwendwa, "US musician Kirk Franklin set sooth city souls," *Saturday*, 12 September 2009, p. 18.
- 9 Tim Kamuzu Banda, "A Good Year for Kenya's Gospel Music Industry," p. 2.
- 10 "Twenty Shillings Million Crossover Bonanza," *The Standard*, 27 December 2010, p. 17.
- 11 Brenda Kageni, "Gospel Music Made Us," *The Standard*, 13 January 2009, p. 19.
- 12 Samuel Ochieng, "Exactly what is this thing that's ailing Kenya's Gospel Music Industry today?" *The Shepherd*, Oct, 2010, pp. 2–3.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Tim Kamuzu Banda, "A Good Year for Kenya's Gospel Music Industry," p. 2.
- 16 Nicholas Asego and Caroline Nyaga, "Songs, Politics and Cash," *Sunday Standard*, November 2007, p. 4.
- 17 See for example the *Standard on Sunday*, 19 December 2010, p. 19.

CHAPTER 36

Religion and Globalization

Asonzeh Ukah

Introduction

In a recent book with an intriguing title of *God is Back* (2009), John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge articulate what they believe to be the reasons for the “the global revival of faith” and how this revival is transforming the world. Regarding Africa, the authors claim that Christianity has grown in the region from ten million in 1900 to more than 400 million Christians at the turn of the millenium (2009:16). The authors also argue that expansion of Christianity in Africa can be traced to the expansion of neo-liberal market system, improved technology—travel and communication—and the expansion of Euro-American modernity together with failed expectations or discontents of modernity. “The God is Back hypothesis” is problematic because it suggests that Africa was a religious *tabula rasa* before the coming of the two aggressively proselytizing world religions—Christianity and Islam. More insidious is the espousal and endorsement of the “global culture” thesis which claims that “for all the southward shift in global Christianity, America continues to have a huge influence on the shape of religion . . . [I]n much of the world, particularly developing countries, the most ambitious preachers look to America as a model of how to organize their affairs” (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2009:237). This thesis cannot be accepted at face value because it is invested in western hegemonic discourse on globalization. This chapter provides an alternative perspective on globalization from below.

In Africa, God had always been part of the cultural, socio-political, and economic formations of the people and did not go away. There is a strong expansion and intensification of Christianity—particularly its evangelical and Pentecostal brand(s)—but so also with other religious traditions in the continent: Islam, indigenous African religious formations, Hinduism, as well as other amalgams and esoteric traditions. Peter Berger (1999:11) makes a similar point about the rest of the world when he says that “strongly felt religion has always been around [thus] what needs explanation is its absence not

its presence.” Africa has been part of the processes that social theorists of globalization describe as the increasing compression of time and space (Giddens, 1990).

As a complex concept, globalization may be described in many ways as summing up a wide-ranging set of events and processes of interconnectedness between different parts of the world such that earthly inhabitants are now said to be living in a “global village” brought about by the reduction of barriers. Globalization involves integration and differentiations on a world-wide scale where peoples, goods—including destructive military hardware—images, and other cultural items such as money, life-style, and ideas circulate around the world with relative ease and rapidity that is difficult to monitor, control, reverse, or stop. Some theorists of globalization have argued, and rightly so, that the processes of globalization have abrogated political borders and cultural boundaries. Recent events of 2011 in the Arab world, popularly called “the Arab Spring,” testify to this. However, national boundaries have never been more important in history than in contemporary times when there are growing restrictions on people moving from the South to the North. Even though globalization has brought unprecedented integration of human communities and formations through revolutionary technologies in human transportation, data transfer and processing, and electronic communication, it has also facilitated fortification of national or regional borders and restricted access to different parts of the world.

This essay focuses on cultural globalization, particularly its religious aspects, and how the continent of Africa has redefined and re-imagined the globalization paradigm to suit its specific conditions, requirements, and predicaments. The discussion that follows is structured around five sections: 1) definitions and descriptions of globalization processes particularly from the major theories of globalization; 2) origins of globalization; 3) Africa and globalization; 4) the globalizing of African religions and Africanising globalization; and 5) finally a conclusion.

Definitions of Globalization

The globalization discourse is a recent phenomenon through which people are seeking new ways of understanding longstanding socio-economic processes. First appearing in Webster’s Dictionary in 1961, the word “globalization” was first used in describing economic and business activities of certain types of companies (Kilminster, 1997; Waters, 2001). By the mid-1960s, the emphasis on economic processes that such a term describes was already muted in the works of the Canadian media theorist, Marshall McLuhan, who coined the phrase “the global village” to describe the impact of media technology in transmitting information to different parts of the globe instantaneously (McLuhan, 1964, 1987). More rigorous conceptualizations of globalization emerged in the 1980s and 1990s especially with the proliferation and expansion of electronic media such as cable news, mobile telephones, the World Wide Web, and other forms of communication networks.

Some theorists use globalization imprecisely as a synonym for internationalization or transnationalization. While internationalization may refer to events or institutions crossing national boundaries, it rarely captures the understanding of globalization as

compressing time and space such that the world, in the words of Roland Robertson (1991:283), is becoming a “single place.” Anthony Giddens (1990:64) describes the process as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.” For Robertson (1996:8), globalization is a bipolar concept involving “the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the whole world.” Such compression produces interconnectedness or increased integration, which in turn brings about interdependence among societies such that social space becomes increasingly independent of physical space. Malcolm Waters (2001:5) describes globalization as “a social process in which the constraints of geography on economic, political, social and cultural arrangements recede, in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding and in which people act accordingly.” The abrogation of geographical constraints and the resulting complex interactions, social spaces, and interdependency reflect the core meaning of globalization only when “the growing interconnectedness of different regions and locale becomes systematic and reciprocal to some degree, and only when the scope of interconnectedness is effectively global” (Thompson, 1995:150). Globalization processes, therefore, are not unidirectional as Micklethwait and Wooldridge would assert—but multidirectional and multi-dimensional (ecological, military, communication, economic, political, and cultural, crime and diseases).

The processes of globalization are marked by creative tensions between homogenization and heterogenization and resistances, convergences and divergences. Amy Chua in *Worlds on Fire* (2003) demonstrates how globalization, which goes in tandem with the expansion of neoliberal market capitalism (and democracy) also fuels ethnic hatred and social instability around the world. The emergence of supraterritoriality does not completely eliminate specific local places, social spaces, diverse forms of practices, regional boundaries, or even countries; the global inter-relates and coexists with different localities and spaces. Therefore, globalization is not just a *process* of interpenetration and interdependency; it is also a *context and condition* of current social, economic, political, and religious existence characterized by the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of ideas, artefacts, lifestyles, cultures, and religions.

Origins of Globalization

Scholars peg the starting point of globalization at different points in human history. Accepting the view that “phylogenetically speaking, all humans are . . . Africans” (Palmié, 2008:2), it may be argued that globalization started in Africa since transcontinental migration outward began during prehistoric times and continues till today. Africa is part of globalization in many ways because over 35 million Africans currently work in different parts of the world (Jehu Hanciles, 2004:97–8) and participate in a cultural globalization that “represents a significant example of global processes which originate outside the Western world and impact Western societies” (Hanciles, 2008:5). Taking a more historical view, however, some scholars argue that “[r]eligious communities are the oldest of transnationals” and original globalizers (Rudolph, 1997:1).

Specifically, the founding of the earliest “world religions” of Zoroastrianism and Buddhism in fifth and sixth centuries B.C.E is regarded as the beginning of historical globalization. Ulrich Berner (2008:146) defines “world religion” as being grounded on the conviction that there is only one true religion preached and accepted by the world, demanding a strong discontinuity in the process of conversion, and not allowing intra-religious pluralism.” Similarly, James Beckford (2002:165) affirms that “religions have been closely associated with the emergence of most of the world’s empires, the modern world-system of nation states and today’s increasingly globalized social order.” According to Beckford (2008:23), “religious institutions and religious worldviews [and networks] were, in some respects, globalised long before other social institutions.” Early Christianity and the Roman Empire were significant moments in the amplification of the globalization processes (Gilhus, 2008:131–44). Recent works by Roland Robertson (1996 [originally 1992]) and Peter Beyer (1994) have provoked globalization theorists to start paying attention to the religious dimension of the processes of globalization because religion is an essential vehicle and pillar of globalization.

Johannes Fabian (2002:4), for example, claims that the “ideal of a universal reason” during the European Enlightenment period was the first context that underpinned the assumption of “global” in “the sense of attributable to all humans, anywhere and everywhere.” The explorations of diverse parts of the world motivated by secular ambitions in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries increased knowledge and consciousness of the interconnectedness of the planet. Global exploration fueled colonial ambitions and created economic linkages. Furthermore, the discovery of the telegraph and the laying of intercontinental cables intensified linkages between one part of the world and another. Innovations in electronic communication culminating in the World Wide Web and mobile telephony also accelerated interpenetration and linkages. These innovations transformed social, political and economic relations and spaces and have given globalization processes a ready and ever-present visibility in today’s world.

Globalization and Africa

Much of the literature on globalization ignores African participation in worldwide interconnectivity (Beyer, 2007; Robertson, 2009); for a few, the continent is simply a footnote, an after-thought. Some academics allege that Africa and its heritage are marginal in current globalization discourse. Paul Gifford (1998:324) argues that the marginalization of Africa has led to “afro-pessimism” as the dominant mood for Africans, who have lost “self-confidence” in the current global arrangement. For many, Africa represents the continent left behind by global processes, characterized by anarchy and conflict, diseases, poverty, and political chaos; Richard Dowden (2008:1) summarizes such depressing and distressing perception of Africa thus: “Africa has a reputation: poverty, disease, war” (see also: Ellis, 1999; Orji, 2008; Chabal, 2009). In Samuel Huntington’s (1996:47) reckoning, for example, the African heritage is not a distinctive civilization comparable to “Asian civilization” or “European civilization.” Huntington argues that if contemporary global situation will be shaped by interactions and conflicts “along the cultural fault lines separating civilizations” (Huntington, 1993:25), then

Africa may deserve the marginal status accorded it. However, globalization as processes of intensified interpenetration of cultures, civilizations, and political and economic structures of diverse lifestyles, shows that Africa has had a long history of this gradual evolution.

Africa did not suddenly wake up into "the age of globalization." Relative to Africa, global processes of interconnectivity have "time depth" to them which are important in understanding how Africa features in the debates and contestations regarding the sort of connections that describe "globalization" (Cooper, 2002:7). Frederick Cooper (2001:190) is right when he says that Africa has been shaped by linkages within and outside the continent—"by the Atlantic slave trade, by the movement of pilgrims, religious networks, and ideas associated with Islam, by cultural and economic connections across Indian Ocean." In historical times, durable cross-cultural bonds date back to several centuries when the Mediterranean world was at the center of global flows of peoples, ideas, and goods. Egypt was an important enclave for scientific and cultural innovations. The discovery of natural resources, gold, ivory, and other precious metals in parts of ancient Africa was the basis of an extensive commercial interaction and interpenetration between Africa and the Carthaginian Empire in the second century B.C.E. (Appiah, 1992). Mercantile interest was also the primary motive of contact and interaction between Arabs and Africans. Today much of North Africa has been increasingly and inexorably arabized. Both sides of the coast of the Indian Ocean were for a long time important channels of influence as economic, cultural, and religious forms of interaction were conducted between the two peoples. Jean-François Bayart (2000:218) captures this sense when he writes: "the [Sahara] desert was until the end of the nineteenth century an important commercial and cultural axis, a highway for the transmission of gold, trade goods, slaves, Muslim learning, and belief." In East and Central Africa, the cultural influences of Arab presence are still evident. African self-understanding has marks of linkages within the continent and with other continents.

Conceptualizing globalization as diverse systems and processes of socio-cultural, economic, political, and religious interpenetration shows that the African continent has had at least four different phases of such systematic linkages with different parts of the world. Although such previous phases may not have been fully globalized in reach, they were more than local both in importance and in expanse. It is evident, though, that the present phase is the most dramatic of them all, being the one with the most widespread and serious consequences. Each of these phases has reconfigured the relationship and linkage of the territory of Africa to the rest of the world in concrete and specific ways.

Discounting the relationship between the ancient Egyptian empires, the Mesopotamians and Greeks as unsystematic and sporadic, one could conveniently begin with the period of the slave trade as the phase of systematic, sustained, external penetration of Africa as Peter Henriot (2003) has done. Henriot asseverates, with some degree of justification, that the current period of globalization or "interdependence of diverse activities occurring across the expansion of the globe . . . is actually the fourth stage of outside penetration of Africa by forces which have negative social consequences for the African people's integral development" (Henriot, 2003:46–7). These four stages of

interpenetration are: the period of the slave trade; the period of colonial invasion and subjugation, the neo-colonial period, and finally, the globalization era.

During the first of Henriot's four phases, a great number of African men, women, and children were exported as commodities to Arabia, Asia, Europe, and North America. Trade in slaves, which started before the founding of Islam, was consolidated with the introduction of Islam. Between the eighth and tenth centuries, African slaves were transported to Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq) as farm hands and cultivators of land managed by Arab mullah-merchants. This gave rise to a strong African presence in the Middle East which is still felt to the present period. During Islamic times, the trade became an important activity of Muslims in Ethiopia who fled Mecca in search of refuge from persecution. While about 40,000 African slaves—excluding those who perished in the process of slave procurement and transportations—were taken away from East Africa alone by Arab slave traders in the 1830s (Hasan, 1985:32), about nine million Africans were transported to the Middle East during the trans-Saharan slave trade (Akyeampong, 2000:189). This trade depleted African population and enriched Arab States while at the same time entrenching Arab culture and influence in Africa. The spread of Arab influence in Africa had religious, economic, cultural, and political consequences as is evident in the invention of Swahili, a mixture of Arabic and African languages, and mixed marriages between Arabs and Africans. Swahili is today a lingua franca in Central and East African societies. Tanzania adopted it as its national language in 1960 (Hasan, 1985:32). Fabian (1998) contends Swahili is a great mediator of a vast complex of thought, representations, images, and performances, and popular culture in Central and East African societies.

The trade in ivory, gold bars, and slaves across the Sahara desert, the Red Sea, the Swahili Coast, and the Indian Ocean continued into, and overlapped with, the period of the transatlantic trade. The transatlantic slave trade, started by the Portuguese about 1440, witnessed the largest forced movement of human beings in human record (Thomas, 1997). This enlarged penetration of Africa and the pillaging of its human and natural resources brought about a change in production patterns in Europe and the Americas, underlaid the rise of capitalism, a pivotal institution and motor of economic globalization. The trade in essential commodities gave rise to an international division of labor that remains an important feature of present capitalist systems. The transatlantic slave trade brought a radical change in the relationship of Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Contact with Europeans brought lasting, but by no means positive, effects on local economies: organization of trade, introduction of new crops, income, and new technologies (Thomas, 1997:12). Above all, it was an integral expansion and interconnection of diverse sections of the world and modes of economic production.

Even as the trans-Saharan and transatlantic slave trades were going on, there was a great movement of pilgrims in the Islamic world that resulted in the formation of religious networks between African empires and Islamic clerics and explorers. The alliances between Islamic theologians and traders and African local elites and leaders yielded mutual benefits in some cases. These African leaders appropriated certain ideas of governance and ordering of social and economic practices associated with Islam. The commercial and religious networks had far-reaching consequences throughout the Muslim world and Africa characterized by cultural inventiveness and adaptation of

the local and the non-local; a synthesis of diverse strands that reflected different and evolving power relations. The empires of Africa—such as Songhai, Mali, Ghana, and Kanem Bornu—developed a linked belief system to Islamic learning and law from Arabia. The rise and flourishing of great empires in West Africa became intimately linked to both the internal and external slave trade and slavery (Beinart, 2000:284–5).

The second phase of external penetration identified by Henriot was that of colonialism. During this period, European countries (Britain, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, and France) determined the fate of the African continent. These European states and their political and economic self-interests dictated national boundaries in Africa, “transportation and communication lines established, agricultural and mineral resources exploited, [and] religious and cultural patterns introduced” (Henriot, 2003:47). Akyeampong (2000) argues that through colonialism Africa and Africans were drawn into Europe’s two serious wars, inappropriately called the two “World Wars.” African colonies supplied food, taxes, and cash crops, and conscription for Europe’s war efforts which took the lives of more than 165,000 Africans (Akyeampong, 2000:199).

The situation was similar during the Second World War, when Italy drew north-east Africa into the war zone, and African soldiers fought and perished for causes they understood little about. Military linkages made Africa embrace military globalization and Africans served in Europe. Additional migrations for economic and educational reasons increased African presence and influence in Europe and other parts of the world. These linkages increased movements of people, capital, resources, ideas, and culture across vast spaces. Similarly, the settler communities of East and Southern Africa and the Lebanese in West Africa, through colonial penetration, made Africa their home for purely economic reasons. Africa’s current political and economic predicaments are in no small measure attributed to the after-effects of the colonial imposition of artificial boundaries and the establishment of weak structures that only served the economic interests of European nations (Chabal, 2009).

Fredrick Cooper argues that “colonization does not fit the interactive imagery associated with globalization” partly because during colonization, “Africans were forced into imperial economic systems focused on a single European metropole” (Cooper, 2001:205). Although formal colonialism was a relatively brief period of time, the trajectories and structures of colonialism instituted greater interconnectedness at a systemic level than previously experienced. European imperialist onslaught in Africa occasioned radical transformation of African social, political, economic, and religious dynamics. Significantly, it was through colonialism that European languages—particularly English, which Benjamin Berber (1995:84), Thomas Friedman (1999:312), and Peter Berger (2000) posit as a pillar of cultural globalization—were introduced into Africa.

Neocolonialism which Henriot calls the third phase of the interpenetration of external interests was characterized by economic domination of formally independent African States by western nation-states through unfair trading and economic relations. Neocolonialism deepened the dependency of African states on western-founded and controlled institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). This period overlapped with the Cold War struggle for supremacy between the defunct Soviet Union and the USA. African States

were manipulated into bargaining pawns. The Cold War, William Beinart (2000) argues, fueled civil conflicts in Africa with far-reaching economic, human, social, and environmental repercussions, as displaced persons and warring parties stripped natural resources for export and survival, thereby compounding environmental losses.

Henriot explicitly calls the fourth stage “the period of globalization, characterized by an integration of economies through trade and financial flows, technology and information exchanges, and movement of people.” In this era of global neoliberal arrangement, the place of Africa, Henriot continues, is one of “minimal influence and maximum consequences” (Henriot, 2003:48).

The paradox of globalization, in the case of Africa, is that the intensification of interconnectedness and inclusion has nevertheless generated exclusion and disconnectedness for Africans. Africa, Francis Nyamnjoh (2004:38) poignantly observes, has experienced “accelerated closures, intensifying realities of borders, divisions and violent strategies of exclusion.” Unarguably, from an economic and developmental perspective, Africa occupies a marginal position and the contradictions of globalization fully play out in Africa where economic and political linkages with the outside world have shrunk overtime resulting in what Francis Nyamnjoh aptly calls “The devaluation of Africa:” the continent is reduced to the site of consumption of what Europe and North America no longer finds useful or wants, ranging from second-hand cars to used household appliances, toxic waste, and unserviceable ideas (modernization) and equipment. In the era of globalization, relations between Africa and other parts of the world are very tenuous and relations between the different African countries are even more so, the rhetorics of an “African Union” notwithstanding. As the experiences of many Africans confirm, South Africa, for example, is more connected to Europe than she is to Ghana or Gabon; Chad and Niger are more connected to France than they are with Nigeria or Malawi. Francis Nyamnjoh (2004:47) succinctly sums up the African predicament when he avers: “Africans, the educated and skilled elite included, face stiff financial and bureaucratic hurdles procuring visas to travel to other African countries, even when the same visas are readily made available, at little or no cost, to Europeans and North Americans who often deplete more than they enhance the economies of the states they visit.” Globalization may celebrate the compression of space and time and the creation of new social geographies; it also generates new boundaries and politics of exclusion, difference, rejection, xenophobia, and marginalization.

Manuel Castells (2000:83) paints a more graphic picture: “In the last two decades of the twentieth century, while a dynamic global economy was constituted in much of the world, Sub-Saharan Africa experienced a substantial deterioration in its relative position in trade, investment, production, and consumption vis-à-vis all other areas of the world.” In a global information age, the capacity to produce information and communications technologies, use, and adapt these is crucial in generating and accessing wealth, power, and knowledge. This capacity is precisely what has by-passed Africa where the infrastructure and manpower for technological breakthrough have been vitiated, drained, or relocated to the west through the phenomenon of brain-drain. The net effect of this state of affairs is that Africa suffers from both a digital as well as a social exclusion from the exercise of power in a globalizing world. Frederick Cooper’s (2001:207) summary seems apt here: “Africa now appears to be part of the half of the

globe that is not globalized.” However, this situation of Africa is not all gloom, for, in the sphere of culture, Africans have asserted and inserted their authority, resilience, and credibility in the global sphere.

Globalizing African Religions and Africanizing Globalization

That Africa is the least globalized of all the regions of the world has not left Africans despondent and feeling victimized: Africans have mobilized important social-cultural resources and capital in dealing with both the positive and negative outcomes of globalization. Even in the context of marginality, African cultural production and assertiveness, particularly in the sphere of religious resourcefulness, have ameliorated the negative imprints of marginality and insecurity in the global context. Definitions of religion are numerous and virtually all are contestable and contested. However, for the purposes of this chapter, Thomas Tweed’s (2006:54) is apt: “Religions are confluences of organic cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries.” In the last four centuries—or in the course of all the phases of interpenetration of Africa as discussed earlier—African religions and other religious systems derived from them have crossed boundaries, deserts, and oceans, drawing diverse populations and cultures in Europe, the Americas, parts of Asia—and of course Africa itself—into a unique globalized religiouscape. Thus, African religions are an important structure and vehicle of contemporary globalization.

Beginning from the first wave of external penetration into Africa, that is, the slave trade era, African religious sensibilities, music, art, and traditions were carried by slaves to wherever they were exported with the exception of Arabia, where slave religion and culture, over time, were extinguished by the totalizing canopy of Islam. African indigenous religious formations as well as religions that draw much of their ethos, ritual element, cosmology, beliefs, etc. from them traveled wherever Africans have inhabited. African traditional religions through its export to various regions of the world experienced severe disruptions and transformations but demonstrated resilience and staying power by adaptations and internal reconfigurations. In the face of other religious traditions, African religions continue to perform significant roles in the lives and self-understanding of Africans, both the educated elite and the ordinary people. The feature of these religions as non-text based has been an important advantage in facilitating their absorptive capacity and potential. As a result—and in addition to the tolerant nature of African deities—virtually any external ritual or doctrinal element can be assimilated without difficulty or crisis, unlike the other religions with written scriptures. Flexibility, mutation, and orality are significant features of these indigenous religions.

The transmutations of these religions have changed parts of their core elements such as proselytization; originally and traditionally African religions were not missionizing but this is no longer the case in their new homes in the Americas where they have borrowed from other proselytizing religions and become themselves missionary religions. As globalization processes intensify local and cultural identities, so also African

indigenous religious identities and cultures, instead of being eradicated by the so-called exponential expansion of Christianity and Islam, have transformed, riding on the waves of globalization; they absorb new ritual forms, reshaping them and entrenching themselves as core identity formation resources. In Africa, indigenous religious structures infiltrate and domesticate both Islam and Christianity thus Africanizing globalization in the process. An important strategy of survival under globalization is multiple identity formations. Africans quite easily adopt multiple religious allegiances whereby they participate in ritual events and functions of a variety of religious traditions without contradiction or conflict. In this practice, Africans assert their right to appropriate and Africanize global practices in their own terms, rather than the terms imposed by outsiders.

The conversion to Islam and then Christianity by many Africans—which was an integral gateway into a translocal system (Peel, 2000)—was greatly facilitated by the inherent character of African indigenous religious and cosmological sensibilities which reshaped and modified these new introductions. This feature is evidenced most markedly by the hybrid character of what is today called “Afro-Atlantic” religions, that is those religious traditions and rituals derived from African indigenous religions as found in the Caribbean, parts of Europe, and the Americas. Thus, the globalization of African religions has not only made African rituals and beliefs more accessible and appealing to many people outside the continent of Africa but has also positively revitalized other religious traditions such as Catholicism, for example, in Brazil and in the healing rituals of Emmanuel Milingo in Rome (Ter Haar, 1987; Lanternari, 1998).

African religions, riding on the waves of globalization, continue to reconfigure religious landscape and cultural identity of a large section of continental Africans, the African diaspora, and a large minority of non-Africans particularly in the Afro-Atlantic world. This point is driven home remarkably by Jacob Olupona and Terry Rey (2008:3) who argue that “Yorùbá religious culture . . . like Christianity, should now be considered a world religion.” Arguably, there are more practitioners of a wide range of Yorùbá religious traditions in the United States of America than among the Yoruba people of West Africa. Yoruba religious traditions diffused from its centre in Ile-Ife to wide culture zones in the east of Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ghana (Ewe, Akan, Fon), the Ivory Coast, and Benin Republic. As Olabiyi Babalola Yai (2008:235) accurately observes, “Yorùbá religion became global by sharing its òrìsà with the immediate, West African neighbors of the people who have come to be collectively designated as Yorùbá, and by adopting some of their deities.” As Yai further observes, this nascent globalization of indigenous religious formations took place before the Atlantic slave trade and with principal actors being Africans themselves. Similar argument can be made for voodoo which has its roots in Africa but has more practitioners outside its home of Benin Republic (Hurbon, 2008). African indigenous spirituality and pious practices have remained a strong impetus and vehicle of globalization before, during, and after the transatlantic slave era. In the era of information and communication, these religious formations are adopting features that reinforce their influence and appeal over an ever wider section of the world through increased commodification and commercialization, insertion into the Internet, migration, and voluntary conversion. In many parts of the world today, many non-Africans are consuming and “joining Africanness” through African religion, music, piety, theatre, etc. (Johnson, 2008).

Furthermore, another significant perspective on globalization vis-à-vis religions in Africa relates to the domestication of both Christianity and Islam and their subsequent expansion in space to wider territories and localities across the world following the movement of people, ideas, images, and fantasies as well as capital. As Patrick Chabal (2009:35) says, "African Muslims have long practised a form of Islam that accommodates local religious beliefs;" wherever they have traveled to, they have introduced this domesticated or Africanized Islam which they carry with them, reproducing and further accommodating local circumstances to their existential needs. African Muslims from North and West Africa have a strong presence in Europe, particularly France, where their form of Africanized Islam holds sway with its strong networks of trade and kinship tie. The intensification of local identities and culture as a consequence of globalization adds impetus to plural religious cultures everywhere, including Europe and the USA.

Africans did not passively receive Christianity when it was introduced by European and American missionaries; they actively Africanized its rituals, dogmas, music, art, and other related practices. Initial and on-going conversion to Christianity in Africa was, and is, more a matter of convenience and cultural context than conviction and dogma, a fact that lends credence to what Allan Anderson (2000) aptly calls "African reformation" which issues in African Initiated Churches (AICs) with their emphasis on images and practices of power, material objects of salvation, and feelings as embodiments of beliefs (cf. Morgan, 2010). The emergence and rapid spread of the Aladura movement in western Nigeria and their Zionist counterparts in southern Africa clearly exemplifies the depth, revolutionary character, and trans-cultural appeal of the domestication of mission Christianity in Africa (Sundkler, 1961; Peel, 1968; Mitchell, 1970) as well as its diversification such that there is no longer one, hegemonic Christianity but a variety of African Christianities (Ukah, 2007). African Initiated Churches have spread to different regions of the world and have grown and proliferated at the beginning of the twenty-first century into a massive phenomenon of religious change of global significance.

The transplantation of African Initiated Churches in the West has been described as "reverse mission." These migrant religious organizations are powered by a new missionary zeal; they mobilize human and material resources to build up Christian communities and networks aimed at reorganizing migrant lives and transforming the religious ecology of their host societies. African migrant religions which began in the twentieth century among African migrants in Europe has grown with the "Pentecostal revolution" in Africa. Peter L. Berger (2000) argues that "Protestant evangelicalism", particularly in its Charismatic and Pentecostal variant, is one of the four faces of globalization; and scholars such as Allan Anderson (2007) and Ogbu Kalu (2008) insist on the multiple origins of Pentecostalism. Jehu Hanciles (2008:71) describes it as "a polycentric movement with no pope or Mecca [characterized by] entrenched sectarianism and proliferating fiefdom." The rapid acceptance and expansion of charismatic and Pentecostal Christianities in Africa have launched a reconfiguration of evangelicalism in a global context and a rethinking of Christianity outside western European mission paradigms (Jenkins, 2002, 2006; Wilson, 2008).

The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) exemplifies Hanciles' notion of globalization from below and reflects an African, non-western, model of religious

globalization (Jenkins, 2002:205–6, 208; Ukah, 2004, 2005a, b, 2008). Founded in the backwaters of Ebute-Metta in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1952 by a former traditional healer who converted to the Church Missionary Society in the 1920s and later moved on to the newly established Cherubim and Seraphim Movement, Josiah Akindayomi, had a vision to convert the entire world to Christianity. The church had a shaky start and was slow in expanding until the 1980s—a period that corresponds to the high-water mark of globalization—when a new leader re-founded and rebranded the organization, remodeling it into a missionary movement, energizing it with new doctrines, vision, rituals, and organizational structures such as para-church and elite groups. Economic turbulence in Nigeria in the mid-1980s forced many educated church members to seek education and employment opportunities in Europe and North America. These migrants started new churches and in North Africa today the RCCG which started in 1992 has over 400 parishes. The RCCG started parishes in the United Kingdom from 1989 and today they have more than 311 (Ukah, 2009). The church has established more than fifty congregations in South Africa; the first was founded in 1996. Arguably the fastest growing church worldwide, the RCCG has congregations in nearly 100 countries and more than five million congregants, according to an internal source. These congregations outside Nigeria are not just replicas of their Nigerian counterparts—or “mother-parishes” as they are sometimes called—but creative adaptations according to specific social, economic, and political contexts.

Conclusion

According to Caroline Plüss (2009:491), “Migrants, including missionaries, engage in processes of globalization of their religious beliefs and practices when they express these beliefs and practices in cultural, social, political, or economic arenas that span several geographical regions.” African migrants are carriers of innovative religious ideas and practices; they institutionalize these in structures of permanence to generate robust networks spanning different societies and regions, are actively rearticulating and contesting the contours of globalization. African migrants negotiate and reformulate boundaries of religious culture through the churches they establish. Migrant religions generate religious diversity; they stimulate vitality through innovation and competition for scarce resources. Although much of Africa has been left behind through information technology, globalization as contemporary processes of interconnectivity and interpenetration is not a radically new phenomenon in Africa. Religion and migration have provided Africans the leverage to contest globalization as a unidirectional process; African indigenous religious formations are today globalised in the sense that they have adherents and enthusiasts outside of Africa. Furthermore, Africans have creatively domesticated and Africanized Christianity and produced a variety of Christianities as a result of the interaction between mission/colonial Christianity and indigenous cultures. (This is similarly the case with Africans’ interaction and domestication of Islam.) The resultant Christianities have become globalized through African immigrant religious formations, which are inexorably altering the global face of Christianity and generating a new form of global religious ecology.

CHAPTER 37

Religion and Same Sex Relations in Africa

Marc Epprecht

Malawi is “a God-fearing nation,” intoned Malawian Member of Parliament, Edwin Banda, as that parliament voted to amend the constitution to prohibit same-sex marriage in August 2009 (homosexual acts, or “unnatural offences” as the penal code puts it, were already illegal). In expressing this view, Banda joined a chorus of prominent religious and secular leaders across the continent who have harshly condemned homosexuality and who steadfastly reject entreaties to respect sexual orientation either as a human right or as a god-given attribute. Since the mid-1990s, this has included politicians like Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe (Catholic) and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda (born again). African theologians have also taken a lead role in what is effectively a schism of the worldwide Anglican community. The breakaway “Primates Council” is headed by Nigeria’s Archbishop Peter Akinola while no less than seven of its eight councillors hail from Africa. Not to be outdone, President Yahya Jammeh of Gambia, a Muslim, allegedly threatened to “cut off the head” of any homosexual who did not leave the country within 24 hours.¹

A number of commentators have characterized such homophobia as a legacy of colonialism, exacerbated in recent times by the need for scapegoats by insecure politicians or by competition for souls between the major world religions (Aarmo, 1999; Gaudio, 2009, for example). Yet, secular African intellectuals have also long asserted the non-existence of homosexuality in African societies and its repugnance to African traditional values. From that perspective, the early Christian missionaries recognized and appreciated fundamental truths in African traditional religions that liberal western theologians are now betraying. In a striking irony, Africans who seek to justify current homophobic laws and rhetoric sometimes cite early missionary and colonial ethnographers to establish the *bona fides* of homophobic African traditions. More recent scholarship and the direct testimony of same-sex identified Africans are simply ignored in the process.²

This chapter questions such a characterization of African traditional religions as uniformly or essentially intolerant of non-normative sexuality. Focusing on the

Bantu-speaking peoples of Zimbabwe, it builds upon a critical re-reading of the ethnography, on forensic evidence from male-male sexual crimes from the early colonial period, and on an analysis of oral testimony from same-sex identified traditional healers (*n'angas* in chiShona, and *sangomas* in the second indigenous language of Zimbabwe, siNdebele). While not suggesting a pan-African culture in opposition to imported sexual mores from Europe or the Middle East, I do note strong commonalities with studies from elsewhere on the continent. These support some general conclusions about how African societies understood, explained, and dealt with people who did not conform to the expectations of heteronormativity or who did not respond to attempts to "heal" sexual difference. Contemporary attempts to co-opt "tradition" to repress a sexual rights movement deeply misrepresent ideas and practices embedded in traditional religions. That is, continuities between traditional culture and homophobic Christian or Islamic discourses are overstated. Traditional religions were in fact less dogmatically intolerant of, and indeed sometimes more respectful toward, sexual difference than is frequently claimed.³

Normative sexuality in any society is affected by the material conditions the society faces to survive and the political structures that develop over time to manage people as economic actors. In short, one cannot understand what normative (and hence non-normative) sexuality is in any given culture without first understanding the broader context of the political economy in which it came to be. Throughout Southern, East and Central Africa for the past two thousand years the political economy was profoundly shaped by labor shortages at key points in the production cycle. In a relatively precarious environment and climate, this could endanger the survival of the society. Survival then constituted a powerful incentive to maximize family size, to construct gender relations that emphasized fertility, to conflate sexuality with procreation, and to anchor religio-political institutions within and around fecund, stable heterosexual relationships.⁴

The religious beliefs of Bantu-speakers throughout the region demonstrate these points. Traditional religions in Zimbabwe, notably, exalted the link between sex and reproduction and blurred the lines between the living, unborn, and dead. Indeed, familial ancestors were revered, and perhaps feared, as elders who could intervene with the living as necessary to ensure the community's continuity to future generations. Ancestors had to be consulted and appeased for their power to influence rains, to improve soil fertility, and to resolve family disputes. For the living, as temporary guardians of the land, many children were thus not merely a source of labor to support one through to old age, they were also the means to acquire descendants who would look to you as an ancestral spirit with a role in community decision-making that could linger for many generations after death. The most powerful spirits (*mhondoro*) were precisely those ancestors who had been most politically successful in life, that is, who had established a prolific lineage. Conversely, failure to procreate precluded a person from receiving full burial rites, consigning their spirit to shameful obscurity.

The centrality of fertility to ancient Shona religion has led some scholars to see sexual imagery as pervading, or even dominating, ancient public spaces and rituals, notably in vaginal and phallic-shaped structures, carvings, and divination tools (Huffman, 1996, notably, extrapolating to the Venda). Such claims are likely excessive.

Evidence from modern Zimbabwe, however, does suggest that the cultural construction of a spiritual meaning to sex has deep historical roots. Among the Karanga, for example (one of the largest ethnic components within the Shona and the architects of Zimbabwe's first and most enduring states), the anthropologist Herbert Aschwanden found the belief that a man's semen "makes him immortal," that "the act of procreation is a sacred event" and that the male orgasm was comparable to God descending to the people (Aschwanden, 1989:38). The Shona tradition of praise poetry also valorizes sexual intercourse resulting in male orgasm and female pregnancy. In all three types of praise poems that were performed at public ceremonies, sexual accomplishment is central to the praise (Fortune and Hodza, 1974). Shona aphorisms idealize this purposefulness as well. Hence, "a man can find a meal very tasty, but if he vomits afterwards, then it has not done him any good" (that is, orgasm without impregnation is useless—Aschwanden, 1982:207).

Semen, like blood, possessed certain metaphysical qualities that could endanger the community if not contained within the proper sphere or if either inappropriately came in contact with the other. Such danger was expressed in terms of uncleanness or pollution. Indeed, one word for semen is the same as something unclean on the body or excrement (*tsvina*). There were consequently important taboos to be respected about touching these fluids, and about women avoiding sex or even proximity to men and men's property (cattle in particular) during menstruation. Other metaphors spoke to the need for balance between dryness and coolness on the one hand and wetness and heat on the other. Were the balance disturbed by improper sexual behaviour, health and happiness would suffer and not simply for the individuals directly involved but for the family and potentially the whole community.

Shona traditions do acknowledge slightly variant sexualities within the dominant narrative of fertility. These were attributed to men of different totems that cut across ethnic lines—Ngara men were reputed for their sexual prowess and virility, for example, Mhofu for their secretiveness, and Shiri for coarseness. Variations in normative female sexuality were also acknowledged. The key factors in this were age and successful pregnancies. The more of the latter a woman had, the greater the prestige she enjoyed in the community. Women who reached menopause (dry, cool) with many successful pregnancies (wet, hot) were accorded almost as much respect and influence in the community as senior, demonstrably virile men. Conversely, a married woman who could not get pregnant or successfully carry a pregnancy to term was an object of scorn and pity, not least of all to herself.

Over time, men's and women's differential fertility contributed to the development of a pronounced class hierarchy and the rise of sophisticated state structures. These then added a further, political imperative to sexual reproduction. The control of female sexuality through the institution of *roora/lobola* ("brideprice") was central to this process. *Lobola* was gift of cattle from the family of the groom to the family of the bride (that is, the exact opposite of a dowry in Asian and European traditions). *Lobola* acknowledged that the young woman's labor and offspring were lost to her natal family upon marriage and went instead to contribute to the prosperity of her in-laws. Indeed, cattle-received for *lobola* not only provided a direct source of wealth for the bride's family (meat, milk, draught power), but could also quickly be recycled as *lobola*—given to

secure wives for sons, to expand a polygynous household with new wives, and to strike strategic alliances with other men. A polygynist could deploy the labor and sexuality of additional wives, concubines, pawns, slaves, and daughters in order to attract male clients. The labor of male clients could in turn be directed to new forms of wealth creation—raiding or enforcing tribute payments from neighbors, mining, smelting, and trading gold, notably.

From around 1000 C.E., some families began to be distinctly successful in parlaying daughters into cattle into wives into political power. By 1200, a class structure had more or less consolidated whereby Karanga elites controlled huge herds of cattle. With these they secured the loyalty of their subjects by paying *lobola*, by loaning the cattle out, and by conspicuously rewarding followers with feasts and ceremonies that secured the goodwill and wise advice of the ancestors. Elites began to have monumental houses of stone built for themselves and family, thousands of which *madzimbabwe* today lie in ruin throughout the region. By the time the Portuguese arrived in Zimbabwe in the early sixteenth century, the most important Shona rulers were said to have thousands of wives of varying status and to exercise political/religious influence over a vast area.⁵

In this context, senior men, brothers, and female elders had strong incentives to maintain careful vigilance over younger people's heterosexual contacts. The mother of a girl who was certifiably a virgin upon marriage benefited directly with a bonus to the *lobola* payment known as the *mombe ye amai*. The chances of making an upwardly mobile marriage or becoming the favored wife in a large polygynous household were also hugely increased by a girl's virginity. By contrast, the family of girls who could not be attested to be virgins forfeited both the bonus payment and the potential of social advance. A girl who got pregnant before marriage also showed a potentially dangerous streak of disrespect for her elders that brought shame upon the family. Her behavior invited the family of the groom to negotiate a lower *lobola*. The potentially frustrating consequences for her brothers (who then had to wait longer until their parents had the means to acquire wives for them) increased the pressure on girls to remain chaste.

Girls learned their sexual vocation directly from aunts (*vatete*) or other elder women. The principal and unwavering injunctions for a girl centered on serving her future husband and his family. Indeed, outside of periods of menstruation and parturition, a wife was expected to be constantly and unhesitatingly sexually available for the husband. Yet along with submission to male power over their sexuality, girls were also taught that the role of wife brought with it a strong entitlement to sexual satisfaction derived from regular sexual intercourse. From the woman's point of view, semen on a regular basis was needed to help keep her healthy, both biologically as well as spiritually. Intercourse in the early months of pregnancy was also needed to nourish the growing fetus. Young women thus learned ways to stimulate men's sexual performance without threatening men's self-assurance. Should the flesh still prove weak, the wife could yet ensure that her husband did his duty by the use of "love potions" or "husband-taming herbs" (*mupfuhwira*).

This focus on male ejaculation into the vagina eroticized the female body in ways that confused and disconcerted early European observers. For example, almost complete nudity and much intimate touching were simply not regarded as sexual. A brother-in-law could fondle the breasts and even buttocks of his unmarried sisters-in-law

without raising eyebrows. But should a man touch a woman's heel (which was tucked under a woman's genitals when she sat respectably), it was to make a bold sexual advance. Boys, it must be added, like girls, could hold hands and drape themselves around each other physically, indeed, could sleep together in intimate embrace, without the closeness being construed as sexual.

Boys in this society also learned their sexual vocation from a very early age in largely homosocial environments. The Shona did not practice the non-penetrative sex play (or "fondling") between adolescent boys and girls found in many other African societies (known as *hlobonga* in isiZulu, for example, *ukumetsha* in isiXhosa, and *ngweko* in Gikuyu). During the period of waiting between physical maturity (as males) and social maturity (as married men), therefore, young males were expected to exercise, and were coached in, self-restraint. Far from being regarded as unmanly, young men's sexual self-restraint was honored as contributing to the greater social good. The same applied to non-polygynous husbands (the majority). Wives had the right to insist upon post-partum abstinence for as long as the new infant was suckling (2–3 years). At the very least, post-partum abstinence extended until the midwife was paid for her services (4–5 months after birth). During that time the husband was expected to exercise self-control or to "go hunting," that is, to masturbate out in the woods (Aschwanden, 1989:97, 99).

All of the above supports the argument that heterosexuality was powerfully overdetermined in traditional society. Life-long socialization, the intricate web of moral and material obligations extending beyond the grave, and an understanding of sexuality that did not regard certain kinds of genital or intimate physical contact as sexual combined to make non-conformity difficult to conceive as an option, let alone to enact. Who in their right adult mind would choose poverty, intense family pressure and possible violence, shame, and lack of spiritual meaning by not marrying and producing children? Who in their right adult senses could believe that they could transgress norms without the wider community getting to know about it, particularly since the community was well known to be watched by the unseen eyes of the ancestors? Nonetheless, cases inevitably happened where individuals did transgress norms and by so doing potentially endangered the standing and security of their families or even the stability of the wider community. In such cases, punishments, cures, and other interventions were assessed by elders in consultation with *n'angas* according to the level of the potential threat. If the sexual transgression did not cross rank, age, and totem (incest) lines, for example, then the punishment could be as little as the payment of compensation of a few beasts to the family of the "victim." A typical such case would be a neglected wife who committed adultery with a non-kinsman. Save for a thrashing to maintain the social appearance of her husband's power over her sexuality, she would likely be forgiven fairly quickly, especially if a child resulted that enriched the household.

On the other hand, if sensitive social lines were crossed in an illicit sex act, the punishment increased accordingly. Incest was a particularly strong taboo and deeply repugnant to the ancestors. As such it evoked punishments ranging from exile to death. The death sentence also awaited those men who dared interfere with one of the Ndebele rulers' wives in the mid-nineteenth century, a level of punishment that was reported widely throughout other states in Africa.

In addition to the specific nature of the infraction and the status of the parties involved, cause was important to consider when assessing punishments. Some sexual infractions were judged to arise in a straightforward way when men's natural lustiness or women's legitimate need for sexual intercourse were frustrated. Payment of compensation and public shaming of the guilty parties were considered sufficient in such cases. Other transgressions, however, defied this easy explanation and could only be understood as the result of intervention by one of the many different types of unseen powers that the Shona recognized. The most feared of these was witchcraft (*muroyi*, pure evil). An act such as bestiality by a grown man would typically be explained in these terms. The perpetrator in such cases had to be expunged from the community by exile or even death.

Another type of spirit that was greatly feared and that could manifest itself in potentially dangerous sexual behaviour was the avenging spirit (*ngozi*). Unlike the pure evil of *muroyi*, its evil stemmed from a deceased person's legitimate grievance against a past injustice—an innocent victim of war or murder, for example, but also commonly a wife who had been neglected or ill-treated in life. *Ngozi* were especially prone to incite outrageous sexual behavior. Girls who flaunted sexual brazenness by kissing in public or seducing men indiscriminately could do so with impunity if the cause were determined to be possession by a spirit of this nature. The only solution was to appease the *ngozi* by offering the afflicted family compensation, typically a virgin daughter of the family that had caused the offence that provoked the *ngozi* in the first place. That girl would normally become a servant or slave in the family with the *ngozi*, but in extreme cases she could be ritually executed.⁶

A third example of a spirit that affected women's sexuality was the *chidhoma* or *chikwambo*, the Shona equivalent of the *tokoloshi* known elsewhere throughout southern Africa. A *chidhoma* was a well-hung imp that, among other mischief, sometimes crept into married women's huts at night to stimulate them sexually. Nocturnal visits by a *chidhoma* could explain both a woman's otherwise unseemly sexual arousal or her lack of interest in her husband's attentions. Rather than punishing the woman for these inappropriate behaviors (and so inflaming the *chidhoma's* capricious anger), a "cure" would be affected by the husband making sacrifices or other prescribed gestures of appeasement.

According to *n'angas* interviewed in the course of this research, same-sex sexual infractions traditionally had several possible causes and consequently were regarded with ambivalence. Homosexual experimentation and bestiality among adolescent boys took place as a normal part of the learning process about heterosexuality. Boys did the herding. Out in the bush, sexual practice with each other or animals was "actually expected" as "experimental" at the age of puberty.⁷ A boy's interest in such sex play was expected to wither away as he matured, coached on if necessary by the mockery of peers and perhaps a discreet talking-to by elders. Unmarried girls also engaged in a type of sex play. *Kusenga* was the practice of manually stretching their *labia majora* through a daily exercise. A girl might spend hours at *kusenga* with a little help from a close friend without for a moment doubting that the activity was in the interest of pleasing the future husband.

What we today would now term homosexual orientation or trans-gender identity was also not necessarily an offense but a respected attribute if caused by certain types

of spirit possession and manifest in certain ways. This would have included rare cases of physiologically ambiguous genitalia (hermaphroditism or intersex) as well as possession by benign spirits of the opposite sex (more on this below). Such explanations of cause removed blame from an individual, and same-sex couples so possessed could live together as husband and wife without attracting opprobrium. A male in role of the latter, doing all the public duties and chores that a female wife would do, was known as *murumekadzi* (literally, “man-woman”). A woman who took the role of a man in an analogous relationship with another woman was *mukadzirume* (“woman-man”). In both cases, what happened between the couple inside their hut was not the subject of close investigation.⁸ Similarly, a man who never married or appeared resigned to a life of celibacy was thought to have *chitsina*, an otherwise inexplicable streak of bad luck. The concept of *chitsina* obviated close enquiry into actual sexual behavior or inclinations.

Lack of blame or even concern about such reasonably accountable deviance from the sexual norm comes through in a range of accounts. In a criminal case from 1927, for example, Nomxadana alias Maggie was charged with posing as a female nurse and wearing female clothes (including underwear and high heels). His father, when questioned in an accusatory tone by the prosecutor about his son’s behavior, defended himself:

I have never noticed anything peculiar about Accd [accused, *sic*] I have always thought him sound in his mind . . . At the kraal Accd used always to dress in female clothes. He has always worked as a nurse. He associated mostly with girls at the kraal. My son has been wearing dresses ever since he was a baby. He has never discarded them although I have often given him males’ clothes but he has refused to wear them. I have never thought him mentally affected.⁹

Even in cases involving otherwise normal males beyond the years of acceptable youthful experimentation, same-sex sexual acts were not necessarily taken as serious breaches of morality. Such an act might be a mere “accident” stemming from physical proximity. After all, bachelors normally slept together, typically in the nude and huddled together for warmth in ways that sometimes unavoidably stimulated genital arousal. “Accidents” were also prone to happen after having imbibed too much beer. Punishment in such cases would be an essentially token compensation payable to the family of the “victim.” The *only* discussion of sodomy and indecent assault on a male in Shona legal traditions (by Native Commissioner F.W.T. Posselt, 1935) puts it this way. First, the two offences “are not clearly distinguished. Where several males sleep together and the offender pleads that the act was done in his sleep, he will be excused from criminal liability; cognizance will, therefore, in practice, only be taken where direct force has been applied. The penalty consisted of damages of several head of cattle, payable to the victim’s family” (Bullock, 1935:59). Headman Mbata, testifying on “native custom” in a 1921 case from Mazoe district, more or less confirms this, setting the compensation for a deliberate attempt at sodomy or indecent assault at one beast only. “If however it was done while sleeping we would still require reparation but only a small amount.”¹⁰ As comparison, and indicative of the relative harmlessness of the crime, the compensation imposed for female adultery or breach of promise was set at 10–12 beasts.

Cases of flagrant and persistent homosexual behavior were naturally regarded with much greater concern. If the community suspected that witchcraft or sorcery were at play it could in fact demand exile or death. Some contemporary Zimbabweans claim that the latter (execution) was the norm on account of the great danger it posed. As one traditional herbalist told University of Zimbabwe researcher Rudo Chigweshe, "The traditional society believes that homosexuality pollutes the country. A lot of misfortunes, for example, droughts, hunger, and diseases we are having in Zimbabwe are being caused by this evil thing."¹¹ It seems, however, that ambiguity about cause acted as a powerful restraint against capital punishment even in clear cases of homosexual rape. What if the unrepentant, incurable, violent man in such a case were accused of witchcraft when in fact he was really possessed by a transient "stranger spirit" (*shave*)? If executed rather than appeased by the proper rituals, that man could return as an *ngozi* to wreak even greater havoc. Elders thus sometimes went to great lengths to avoid finding the "proof" needed to justify an execution:

In my home village there were several men staying in homosexual relationships and the community never talked about it. They were regarded as unstable or bewitched or witches themselves. People were afraid that maybe they would be violent because of the assumed instability or that they [the accusers] might in turn be bewitched. So basically the homosexuals were left alone. But sometimes the accusations would be a mobilized issue so the chief would have to call a *dare* [public meeting] where they would be tried . . . For them to be killed it would take the village elders a long time going to several traditional healers to find out the truth. Sometimes the healers would refuse to find out because they would not want to be the cause of someone's death.¹²

It needs to be stressed that all of the above took place within a tradition of great public discretion about sexual matters. Shona praise poems performed at public ceremonies did allude to sexual prowess in often ribald ways. However, these were invariably couched in terms of fertility and virility that strengthened confidence in normative sexuality. Public talk that undermined that confidence or called institutions and social hierarchies into question was strictly taboo. Whatever debates and discussions took place in homosocial environments like the men's *dare*, therefore, they could not be repeated in mixed company. Even in the company of each other, men were loath to broach the topic of male-male behavior. In the words of one straight informant: "Yes, traditionally it [homosexual orientation] was there but it was never talked about. Never! As a child you would be told to stay away from the hut of a man who was known by the elders to be that way. But you were never told why. Only after you were grown and you gave those same elders much beer, perhaps, they might be coaxed to say something. But it took a lot of beer."¹³

In practice this culture of discretion around sexual matters meant that acts which were forbidden in theory could be tolerated as long as the community was not compelled to pay explicit attention. Important traditions developed that enabled communities to avert their collective eyes. Such practiced blindness was not necessarily as difficult to achieve as we might assume in the close-knit peasant villages of yore. The custom of *kupindira* or *kusikira rudizi* ("the raising of seed"), for example, allowed families to

avoid the shame of a man's inability (or lack of interest) to impregnate his wife. By this custom either the man himself, his parents, or his in-laws secretly invited a trusted male relative to fulfill the task, typically a brother. The child so conceived would bear the family resemblance so no one would know that the husband had failed in his fundamental duty as a man. He himself might not know it if the arrangement were made at the behest of a frustrated wife. In this way, the public mask of an apparently fertile marriage enabled a man to be heterosexually impotent while saving him from losing his social standing and all-important descendants.¹⁴

Shona states at different times were powerful enough to keep their neighbours at bay, including by inflicting defeats upon the encroaching Portuguese as late as the early nineteenth century. Their power rested in part upon dramatic demonstrations of their material wealth (the *madzimbabwe*) and by ability to muster military force. In addition, high state officials were shrouded by a calculated mystery that distinguished them from commoners and enhanced their political authority. The king or *Mutapa* of the main Shona state from the early sixteenth to the nineteenth century remained hidden from public view behind walls and screens. His words were communicated to the people by a class of praise singers and spirit mediums, couched in terms that equated the wisdom and health of the *Mutapa* with the prosperity of the people as a whole. He was "divine" in the sense that he was the political interpreter of the will of the ancestral spirits. Through his mediums he could ensure that those spirits brought rain and fertility. Or he could have them deny rain and fertility should his people be recalcitrant to his rule. As the physical embodiment of the spiritual health of his people, the *Mutapa* could not die by natural or accidental causes. Rather, when the time approached, he was supposed to perish in a ritual (assisted if necessary) suicide that ensured that the spirit passed without disturbance to his successor.

Ritual incest also irrevocably placed the *Mutapa* outside the realm of normal humanity. The *Mutapa* married his full sister to break one of society's biggest taboos. The intent was not to produce offspring, for which purpose there were many other wives. On the contrary, offspring were purposefully averted by *coitus interruptus*. The role of this incestuous marriage was rather symbolically to "fortify installation" against rival claimants to the status of *Mutapa*.¹⁵ In the case of the Manyika in eastern Zimbabwe, the king for the same reason was reputed to have sex with his own daughter on the back of a tethered crocodile, the latter a symbol of the inscrutable power of the kingship.¹⁶ Such unions were known as *kupinga nyika* ("to protect the land/nation"). *Kupinga nyika* practiced correctly enhanced the mystery and hence the power of the institutions of governance.

Celibacy, as well, could be a public demonstration of difference that commanded respect by so dramatically breaking both the rules of normative society and the dictates of economic common sense. Parents would be the first to notice if a child were developing in this abnormal way—an effeminate boy, for example, or a girl who preferred to play with boys rather than girls as expected. Efforts would be taken to "cure" the problem, first by shaming and perhaps a beating or two, later by consultation with *n'angas* and appropriate sacrifices. In the case of girls, an extreme option was forcible confinement with the betrothed to effect a pregnancy and *de facto* marriage. If, after all these interventions, the child still did not accede to marriage it could be interpreted to

mean that he or she was possessed by a spirit of the opposite sex. A child in such a case would most likely be apprenticed to learn the arts of divination. As time went on, the female spirit who occupied a male body would manifest itself in increasingly feminine characteristics in the man and even, as Gelfand noted in one case, insist that the man wear women's clothing (Gelfand, 1964:84–5). Some informants attest that the more flamboyant the effemininity, the more efficacious the *n'anga*.¹⁷

A male ancestor or water sprite (*njuzu*) whose spirit occupied a female body meanwhile, could hardly be expected to tolerate that body having sex with a man. Aschwan-den (1989:161–4) describes such a case of a woman, Angela, being inhabited by an *njuzu* whose increasingly violent possessions made it impossible for her first to have sex with her husband and eventually even to have mental fantasies about sex with men. Women in such cases would be assumed to be celibate, although they could be married to a succession of young girls who served them, in public, as a regular wife would a husband. These female wives would be replaced as they reached puberty and were married off to men in the proper fashion. The celibacy or virginity of the woman so possessed could become a valued spiritual asset to a community, most commonly as a traditional healer but sometimes even more powerfully connected to ancestral wisdom. As one informant explained:

There are no lesbians in our culture but we have special women who will be given powers by strong *n'angas* to act as *mbonga* [guardians] for the chief. The woman will not marry for the rest of her life [but instead] will be pledged to a spirit that acts as guardian for the chief. For the spirit to guard the chief properly it needs a wife because it is obvious that a strong body guard must be a man. The *mbonga* is given the woman as his wife. She will be used as his wife without her knowledge when she is asleep. In return she is given all the favors of the chief. The *mbonga* will be treated as if she is someone else's real wife because if any man tries to court her, the spirit will cause bad luck for him. That is why she will never ever have sex with a man.¹⁸

Mbonga were often the actual sisters or aunts of the ruler. Kings depended upon them for advice as well as *muti* (medicine) to such an extent that “in war the *mbonga* was supreme” (Shire, 1994:154).¹⁹

Ritual incest and celibacy may not have been the only forms of calculated “sexual inversion” for political purposes. In other parts of southern Africa (best attested in Angola and Namibia) there existed a caste of male diviners known by variations of *chibudi*, *chibanda*, *quimbanda*, *gangas*, or *kibambaa*. These men, described as “passive sodomites” by early European explorers and traders, were reputedly possessed by especially powerful female spirits. They were said to have dressed as women except with a loincloth open at the back to invite anal penetration. They would entice men into sex, charging a fee for the service. The active partner either gained by contact with the spirit (good crops or hunting, health, protection from evil spirits and so on) or realized his own homosexual preference: “When an Ukuanyama man falls a prey to this practice he discards his weapons, his bow, his arrows and his assegai (the distinguishing marks of manhood) and plays the *ekola*. He is no longer regarded as a man, but as one whom God has intended to be a man, but who is after all only “half man, half woman.”²⁰

Travel accounts from as early as the sixteenth century remark that *chibados* “married” each other and were esteemed in their societies as “powerful wizards.”²¹ To the consternation of the Portuguese, they even turned up in the holds of slave ships bound for the Americas where they inflamed a disturbed spirit (of resistance?) among the other captives (Sweet, 1996). Transvested African slaves were also among those interrogated and executed for the “nefarious sin” of sodomy during the Inquisition in both the Americas and in Spain itself. The prominent male homosexuality and transvestism among the priests of the *caboclo* or *candomblé* possession cults of north-eastern Brazil are likely traceable to this Angolan heritage (see Landes, 1940, also discussed by Matory, 2005 with reference to the Yoruba).

Whatever their actual sexuality, symbolic sexual inversion, or difference among certain elite women and men was clearly functional to the process of forging and maintaining relatively centralized state structures in the context of pre-colonial southern Africa—sparsely populated, preliterate, and lacking horses and the kinds of technology that supported state formation in Europe and Asia. Indeed, transvestism and symbolic sexual inversion were fairly common features of African societies throughout much of Africa south of the Sahara at the time of the European expansion. Among the Lovedu, a Karanga offshoot from roughly 1600, the inversion involved women rather than men. The authority of the Lovedu “rain queen” (in fact, a king in status) was believed to be dependent upon her virginity and her marriage to girls (Krige, 1974).²²

Notions of female pollution could also require men to protect themselves, at the very least by abstinence around menstruation. This could assume political importance on important ritual occasions. Donald Donham’s analysis of the *ashtime* role in Maale society of southern Ethiopia (Donham, 1990) reveals a case in point. *Ashtime* (translated as male “transvestites”) performed domestic labor and ritual functions in the king’s court. The king, as “the male principle incarnate,” had to be protected from even the merest whiff of female sexuality at key moments in the ritual life of the nation. For men around him to sleep with *ashtime* at those times was thus a means for them to help him preserve the symbolic, heterosexually virile masculinity of the head of the nation. In no way was penetrating an *ashtime* regarded as homosexual, bisexual, or unmasculine.

Bordering on sorcery were ritual male-male sexual acts intended to invoke a protective or enriching medicine (*muti*). This form of *muti* had its own term: *divisi rakaipa* (bad). By most accounts, bad *divisi* among the Shona involved incest with a female relative for the purpose of curing an otherwise incurable disease or persistent misfortune. As one Shona scholar expressed it, “for medicinal purposes a brother and sister may mate” (Hatendi, 1973:136). Male-male *divisi rakaipa* was even more powerful and could be used to cure impotence, improve soil fertility, or to advance political ambitions. Male-male sexual acts for the sake of *divisi rakaipa* were deemed to be so powerful and extreme, however, that they approached the quality of witchcraft and could be punished by death. Fear of its power would tend to keep victims and their families silent, which may partially explain early anthropologists’ failure to observe and report its existence.²³ Yet some oral traditions trace the practice back to war preparations in pre-colonial times:

I know the *ngochani* [male-male sex] was traditionally done by chiefs and the leaders of soldiers here in Zimbabwe. The chiefs here were given strong medicines by the Ndebele and

Zulu [Ngoni] *n'angas* . . . I also know that even the Ndebele and Shona when they were fighting, the soldiers they were made to have sex with other men for the whole group to be powerful. You see the Ndebele and Zulus were practicing it since long back. But due to friendship, we Shona people have learned about that medicine from them and we are also doing it.²⁴

Traditional religion in Zimbabwe, as elsewhere in Africa, could not be neatly disaggregated from politics, the economy, or culture broadly conceived. Likewise sexuality could not be disassociated from religion. The feelings and progeny that came from sexuality connected individuals to the metaphysical world. Religion gave meaning to prosaic sexual acts, explained and symbolically protected preferred sexual relationships, and provided a sense of order and continuity against the rambunctious erotic. That order emphasized heterosexual intercourse bounded by strong incest, age, and other taboos against public expressions of individual sexual desire.

Yet traditional religion also recognized, explained, and to some extent enabled a degree of sexual diversity. The relatively sophisticated array of beliefs and practices around same-sex sexuality and gender non-conformity do not support contemporary claims about uniformly harsh retribution or intolerance. There may have been cases of execution or exile for violent acts associated with witchcraft, although even then checks and balances were built into the process of assessing the cause of the crime and to avoid inadvertent insult to the ancestors. In other cases, the attitude towards being caught in an inappropriate sexual relationship could be surprisingly blasé. As noted, for example, a Zezuru headman told a colonial magistrate that “native custom” dictated a fine of one beast for attempted sodomy.²⁵ Such a fine bespoke a fairly common misdemeanor rather than a serious felony. The same would appear to be the case also from the testimony of an Ndebele man tried in 1917. When charged with indecent assault Tayisa said simply, “I admit the offence. I did not know it was a crime.”²⁶

Notes

- 1 “Gambia gay death threat condemned” May 26, 2008. This, and the other points above, were reported on the pan-African gay rights website, *Behind the Mask*—www.mask.org, accessed September 4, 2009.
- 2 Epprecht (2008, 2009) and Smith *et al* (2009). See also Hoad (2007) for a genealogy of homophobia among African Anglicans, and “academic homophobia” using problematic colonial sources.
- 3 The following is principally adapted from my monograph (Epprecht 2006), acknowledging interventions by Baum (1995) and Murray and Roscoe (1998) and subsequent studies from around Africa including Morgan and Wieringa (2005), Gueboguo (2006), and Gaudio (2009). For methodologies in transnational research see Canaday (2009).
- 4 Theories of sexuality supporting this claim includes, Foucault (1978), developed in African studies by Jeater (1993) and Arnfred (2004), etc; Ethnographies of the Shona consulted include Gelfand (1964, 1979), Bucher (1980), Aschwanden (1982, 1989), Bourdillon (1976), and Shire (1994). The Ndebele and Zulu are the subject of Posselt

- (1935), Bozongwana (1983) and Ngubane (1977). Regional studies of sexuality are provided by Guy (1980), Davison (1997), and Huffman (1996), while the use of traditional idioms in contemporary discourses in Zimbabwe and South Africa are analyzed by Goebel (2002), Hunter (2005), and Rödlach (2006).
- 5 See Musisi (1991) for a similar history of state formation and grand polygyny from East Africa.
 - 6 Sekuru Muyambo (*n'anga*) interviewed by S. Bruce and Epprecht, Odzi, 10 March 1998. See also Schmidt (1997).
 - 7 Interview, G.M. Chavunduka cited in Phillips (1997:476) and Solomon Mutsvairo cited in Anonymous (1996:17)—both informants highly respected academic experts on Shona culture, confirmed in oral testimony for the present research. See also Bourdillon (1995), Shire (1994), and Chigweshe (1996).
 - 8 Mbuya Chikwizi interviewed in Mutare by W. Zimunya, Feb. 1998; *N'anga* (anonymity requested) interviewed in Gokwe by T. Machida, Feb. 1998. The one major ethnographic study of the plateau Tonga of Zambia (closely related to Zimbabwe's third largest ethnic group, the valley Tonga), mentions a similar phlegmatic acceptance of mixed gender identity presumably linked to a physiological condition (Colson 1958:139–40).
 - 9 Zimbabwe National Archives, D3/5/74, case 3838A of 10 January 1927 (Rex v. Nomxadana alias Maggie).
 - 10 Rex v. Jenwa, case 149 of 1921, D3/10/2. See also Posselt (1935:59). For comparative studies from the Xhosa and other Bantu-speakers along the frontiers of Cape Colony, See, Cape Colony (1873) and MacLean (1906:62).
 - 11 Mr. Makoni interviewed in Chigweshe (1996:45).
 - 12 *N'anga* interviewed by T. Machida, Gokwe, Feb. 1998. Possession by a male *shave* spirit in fact was one of the most common types of possession for unhappy or neglected wives, who typically behaved as men (including performing lewd men's dances in public) until appeased by food and proper attention.
 - 13 "Baba Itai," interviewed by author, Magamba village, Wedza district, 8 December, 1996.
 - 14 Bullock (1912:42) refers to this, or a variant of it, as a "temporary husband" (*ku puwa munhu*) with the initiative coming from the wife.
 - 15 Bucher (1980:32) citing Michael Bourdillon's doctoral dissertation. For an example of the same ritual among the Swazi, see Kuper (1947:203).
 - 16 According to an anonymous Portuguese document, c. 1794, cited by Beach (1994:154), confirmed by oral informants in Maxwell (1999a:232).
 - 17 *Gogo* Nguni (pseudonym requested) interviewed by Epprecht and T. Machida, Epworth, 19 June 1997. "*Gogo*" means "grandmother" in Shona and Ndebele, and this young male *n'anga* personified the point in his effeminate demeanour.
 - 18 Mr. Nyabonda interviewed by Nyaradzo Dzobo, Goto village, February 1998. In the interview, Mr. Nyabonda called the spirit a *tokolosh*, an imported South African term now often used by chiShona-speakers in a generic (and technically incorrect) sense. Transcript edited to correct the anachronism in line with Gelfand (1964) and Bourdillon (1976).
 - 19 See the historical case of VaNyemba, who lived in the eastern part of Zimbabwe in the early to mid-18 century. According to senior male informants interviewed in the late 1970s, she was variously an actual lesbian, had both female and male sex organs, was "normal" except that she kept real bullets in her vagina, and was a *mamuna* (literally, "man or husband") or *mbonga*. National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ); Archives of Oral History (AOH) 40. Interview of Gariwa Chigwedere and Gariwa Chigwedere, Dawson

- Munjeri, the interviewer in Chihota TTL, 5 May 1978, p. 29–30 of the English transcript; AOH 3 Interview with Chief Willie Samuriwo and Isaac S., Chihota TTL by Dawson Munjeri, 10 February 1979, p. 45; Posselt (1935:198); Mr. Nyabonda, Goto village, interviewed by Nyarado Dzobo, Feb. 1998.
- 20 Kirby (1942:349), also noted (as a dying custom in the 1930s) by Esterman (1976:197).
 - 21 Purchas, among others, cited in Bleys (1995) and Murray and Roscoe (1998).
 - 22 The consensus among anthropologists who have studied this and similar woman-woman relationships elsewhere in Africa is that the queen or female husband remained celibate and that there was no homoerotic element to such marriages.
 - 23 See Niehaus (2002) on mineworkers' beliefs, and Tessman (1998 [1921]) for an early account of a similar notion of "wealth medicine" among the Pangwe of Cameroon.
 - 24 Sekuru H interviewed by N. Dzobo at Madya village, February 1998.
 - 25 Mbata, testifying in *Rex v. Jenwa*, case 149 of 1921, ZNA D3/10/2.
 - 26 ZNA D3/26/2 (Fort Usher, Matobo), case 247 of 26 November 1917.

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